

JOHN-NO-BRAWN

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GEORGE LOOMS





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JOHN-NO-BRAWN





# JOHN-NO-BRAWN

BY  
GEORGE LOOMS ✓

AUTHOR OF "STUBBLE"



GARDEN CITY                      NEW YORK  
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TO  
LAURA  
(KATHERINE'S MOTHER)

*“ My third maxim was to endeavour always to conquer myself rather than fortune and to change my desires rather than the order of the world and in general to bring myself to believe that there is nothing wholly in our power except our thoughts.”*

—RENE DESCARTES



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BOOK I

DREAM STUFF



# JOHN-NO-BRAWN

## CHAPTER I

**T**HE sun sets on October the third in Louisville, Kentucky, about forty minutes after five. At five minutes after five on October the third, 1916, John Brawn stood at the corner of Second and Jefferson streets and debated whether or no he would yield to a peculiar sentimental streak of the moment and go a couple of blocks out of his way for the mere purpose of giving some old chords in his memory a chance to revibrate. There was desultory traffic about Second and Jefferson streets; an automobile whisked by, careless of responsibility, for there was no traffic policeman stationed there; a street car had jumped its trolley pole on the curve and the conductor was straining at the rope and looking upward, head thrown back as though angling for some sort of aërial game. There was a mingled aroma of fish and rotting vegetables in the air and a gust of wind sent an eddy of trash, in which was caught an old newspaper or two, whirling out the centre of Second Street. But a momentary rift in the clouds allowed a deep gold to stream through in a wide band, part of which splashed with its luminance the shiny round bald head of an old Negro who was spasmodically reining in his dis-

pirited steed. The latter buckled in his shafts and vainly tried to shift the irritating bit to a less tender part of his mouth. The Negro turned with the reins clutched tightly to his breast and regarded the retreating cloud of trash and newspapers in whose wake was rolling merrily his hat. And then he painfully clambered down from his wagon and started after it, muttering to himself. There was not much of romantic suggestion in the scene. But there was a softness in the air and not so far above the blackened chimney pots there pressed down a blue haze that carried a touch of Tyrian purple and up to its under side a goldish mist seemed rising, dust particles merely, touched with a passing glory. And John Brawn turned and went eastward along Jefferson Street.

At the corner he paused again and looked out First Street. In this direction the scene changed quite abruptly, though not materially for the better. First Street, south of Jefferson, was a street devoted to leisure and the pursuits of pleasure. On each of the four corners stood, waiting, grog shops with well-worn thresholds and swinging lattice doors that were grimed by the touch of countless hands.

Against the even gray of the eastern sky was a line of gently sloping roofs that came down to the house fronts like hat brims pulled down over the eyes. And there was a dull, listless, waiting air about the dingy windows that bespoke hopeless old age. The houses were grimy and battered and they made no pretence of being other than what they appeared, but in some magic fashion they seemed to Brawn to be clothed in a mist of romance. For he looked, not as normal pedestrians along the normal line of vision, but up-



ward toward where roofs and sky came together, and the yeast of imagination was stirring and mixing with his perceptions. Here had been the Louisville of the 'sixties. Those windows, once curtained with soft drapes and chintzes, had been the outlook from a glamorous and highly coloured existence. Very faintly they suggested crinolines and shawls and billowing skirts and gallantry and high spirit and danger. Then had been a more subtle mingling of freedom and convention. Now it was on the outskirts of a metallic, a machine-made, civilization. The thought of his task just completed contrasted strongly with the tone of his mind. He was a lawyer. He had been investigating the facts of an accident for an insurance company which he represented. He had come into this other world with a stereotyped questionnaire and the results of his investigation were in the leather case in his hand. Fancy a lawyer of the 'sixties or 'seventies proceeding in such manner! But then in the 'sixties produce men did not run motor trucks to the endangerment of the public, nor was there the complex machinery of defence built up against the natural hazards of business. Nowadays a young lawyer was nothing but a glorified clerk. Any one with the ability to read and write could have done what he had just finished doing. The sunlight flashed for a moment obliquely across an opaque pane of glass in a top window like a sulphurous flame on a metallic pool and then winked off again, and the window stared forth as blankly as before. Brawn started and slowly crossed the street and turned south.

Midway in the next block there stood an incongruous structure of yellow pressed brick. It was younger

than its fellows but dingy from the same causes. It was like a man in a dirty, high white collar standing in a crowd of workmen in flannel shirts. It boasted of a cupola of nondescript architecture, new plate-glass windows, and a pair of double doors flush with the sidewalk. It was the museum, the last resting place of the old fire-fighting equipment that had escaped a ruthless scrap heap. Just what had stood on the site of this new building Brawn could not for the moment remember, but then his mind was drifting about in a maze of uncoördinated sensations. Thither he bent his steps as though moved by a fixed purpose.

He passed four or five of the old houses. They were all very much alike. From the pavement to the front door of each ran a flight of wooden steps, parallel with the street and flanked by a single lattice railing, to a sort of stoop or balcony whence one entered the house. This left a recess beneath which, by means of a couple of steps downwards, one entered the basement or servants' quarters, now invariably dark and greasy and very smelly. In the past years these stoops with their wood railings had doubtless been proud symbols of high life and on summer evenings in star-light been linked with the soft rustle of skirts and clinging scents and light laughter. Now they were empty, all save the middle one, whose railing supported the full-blown body of a young Negress with slumbering eyes and full, red lips and an unspeakably dirty, greasy wrapper that rather frankly revealed her native, corporeal charms. She leaned across the railing with her elbows propped comfortably beneath her and watched her world. Brawn gave her a passing glance. And then he pulled up short, with a start.

In his abstraction he had been walking along with his head in the clouds and had not noticed where he was going. And he barely escaped running over a small black body that was squirming on the pavement. Brawn stepped over it and then paused and looked down. An incredibly small Negro baby was sprawled on top of a wiggling, dirty, woolly dog that was reaching out a pink tongue to lick the baby's face, and with some success. Two bare, wiry, brown legs curved behind it in a perfect bow; about its middle was draped a very dirty rag, and up under its arm pits the skirt of its smock was rolled, leaving it practically naked.

"Sam!" called a rich languorous voice. "Git up ouden de street. Ain' you know white folks ap' to run oveh you?"

Brawn glanced toward the voice. The woman had not moved but was gazing at him, elbows on the railing, quite inscrutable but with just the trace of a languid though brazen amusement in the depths of her eyes. The baby raised its head and stared at him and then scuttled for the steps, using its hands for propellers, and with its legs dragging out behind like some mortally wounded animal.

Brawn turned and proceeded on his way.

He came to the door of the engine house, paused, and then pushed it open and went in. For a moment he stood, an intruder in the silence of the place and then called out:

"Hi there, Mr. McBurney. Goin' to work all day?"

Back in a far corner of the narrow room a face looked up from a desk and then some one got up slowly and came toward him. It was a little old man with



spectacles and derby hat, coatless and wearing a vest that hung open, its pockets crammed with pencils and pen holders, pocket rules and spectacle cases, and a heavy, pendulous gold watch chain. "Hey?" he said. "Better light up. Hey?"

"Never mind the lights. It's Brawn. John Brawn. You ought to knock off for the day anyway. Ruin your eyes and your health." Brawn laughed with patronizing heartiness and went over and took hold of the old man's arm. It had been a stock joke with him to twit the old fellow about his industry, which was of as tenuous a quality as possible still to deserve the name. Mr. McBurney was the secretary of the association and his duty was to keep the minutes and the rolls and send out the bills for the dues. The association having dwindled to less than a dozen members gave its secretary a minimum of duties, but in addition to keeping the records he had the added one of keeping up the fire in the little stove in the corner on chill days and locking up the place when the day's business was over. He looked up into Brawn's face with the eyes that were very dim and rheumy and then recognition slowly dawned.

"Hey? John Brawn? Sure. John Brawn. Course I know you. Come set down." And he seized the young man by the wrist, then peered intently at the floor to make sure of his footing and then made great show of dragging his victim back into his lair. "Set right down. Set right down. I wuz wonderin' what had become of you."

Brawn followed him, laughing. "How'd your oil stock pan out?" he called. Mr. McBurney was not strictly deaf, but his attention being hard to get and



still harder to keep made this method seem at least the most probably effective one.

The old man turned and grasping the back of a chair thrust it forward. "Oil stock. Hey?— Set down. Oil stock?—Dunno. They wrote me they had started to drill a month ago. An' then they wrote as how they'd struck sand and then another letter that things were lookin' mighty good. But here lately I ain't never had a word. 'Pears like it takes a powerful time to get down to see where they 're at. Powerful slow."

John Brawn sat down in the proffered chair. "Think they're on the level, Mr. McBurney?"

Mr. McBurney looked up. "Hey?—On the level?—Don't know. How'd I know? All the boys took stock. Sam Baron's boy. Know Sam Baron? He's promotin' it. Sam' us always square." He turned to his desk and fished around in the pigeon holes.

"How much you put in it?"

Mr. McBurney looked back at him reflectively. "How much?—Hey? Ten dollars. Each of us put in ten dollars.—All except Journey Bishop. He ain't seed ten dollars fer fifty years."

Brawn laughed softly and gazed up at the wall above the desk. In a plain oak frame was a long parchment strip with two columns of names—the organization roll. And after each name, all save a very few, there stood a letter "X" in broad tremulous lines, signifying for the name it stood after the distinction of having passed faithfully on. It was very quiet—the noise of the city seemed as remote as though of another life—and through the window Brawn could see a high brick wall around a small square of grass, and a

gray patch of sky. In the front of the room, out in the larger hallway, loomed the shadowy bulk of the old machine with here and there the dull gleam of polished brass. Life had paused here for a moment before plunging on.

"So you haven't heard from them lately," resumed Brawn at length in a musing tone. "Tell you what, Mr. McBurney. Next time, you see me before you invest your money." The old man had turned again to the desk and was still rummaging in the drawers.

"By the way," said Brawn. "I was wondering if you folks might want some old things of the governor's?"

Mr. McBurney looked up momentarily.

"There's an old silver trumpet and a helmet and a couple of red shirts and some papers—rolls and things."

"Keep 'em yourself," said Mr. McBurney. "Ain't they worth nothin' to you?"

"That isn't it. You see, my aunt Mamie died last week. And they're selling the old stuff. Haven't any place to keep 'em. Had to find me a place to live. There isn't any room where I'm stopping."

"Hey?" said Mr. McBurney.

"I say there isn't any room where I am. Thought maybe the association might want 'em."

Mr. McBurney pivoted round in his chair, a look of finality on his face. "Can't find the blamed thing anywhere—Say your aunt Mamie died?—Too bad. Too bad." He seemed to be arranging his thoughts in the back of his head and with some difficulty. "Maybe I took it home. Well, never mind.—So you had to move."

"Yes," said Brawn. "I'm at Mrs. Melton's. Out on Compton Street."

"Hey? —Out on Compton Street?"

Brawn rose slowly to his feet. "I just thought I'd drop in and see if you wanted any of his old trophies. —For the room, you know. You've got a lot of stuff like it there on the shelves," looking off indefinitely into the dim hallway. And then he started toward the door.

"Don't be in a hurry," said Mr. McBurney.

"Have to.—I've an engagement to-night. I thought I'd drop in on you and see."

Mr. McBurney followed him slowly through the silent room. They came to the door and Brawn opened it. Twilight was beginning to settle and it was warm and soft and provocative. There was an odour of frying in the air and to the northwest above the cornices there peeped the edge of a rosy cloud.

"So you've moved," said Mr. McBurney. "How's the law?"

The question startled with its definiteness. "Oh, pretty good.—Little slow at first."

"Son of Judge Brawn oughtn't to have any trouble gettin' started."

Brawn stepped over to the wall and inspected a lurid print. It was a picture of a large structure engulfed in flames. Forms could be seen at the windows and up the ladders firemen swarmed. The sky above the burning building was glaring red and in the street in the foreground a number of people were dashing along madly, women with streaming hair, men waving arms aloft. And in one corner a little group was op-



erating an old hand engine, hanging on to the sidebars with both arms and pumping for dear life.

"Those were the days," said Brawn softly.

Mr. McBurney warmed to such appreciation and came and stood beside him.

"They sure were. And your pappy was there with the best of 'em." He leaned over and peered into the picture. "That 's the old Hope Number Five.—I remember as how Asa Brawn saved her from smashin' to pieces on the Portland Bridge." His tone became deep and mellow and reflective and John Brawn, scenting a tale and a delay, turned to the door and looked furtively out. But the old man was not to be denied. He came and stood beside him in the doorway and the noise of passing machines lent a curious background to his voice.

"It was in August sixty-nine, I remember," he went on, "on a Thursday night. It had been awful dry and hot for a week or so and everybody was settin' out in front along on their porches in their white dresses and things.—About nine o'clock the bells began to ring.—I was settin' in front of Musgrove's paint shop, up on Market Street then, and three or four of the boys was with me. Well, we all jumped up and ran to the engine house and pulled the old machine out onto the street. That was her—in the picture there—the old Hope Number Five, and she cost nine hundred dollars.

"By the time we got her on the street there was a crowd; Bill Jordan, Aleck Smith, Asa Brawn—all the gang. And then somebody called out, 'It's in Portland,' and we were off. I'll never forget that run. It was about two mile, straight down Main Street, and

dusty!—and behind us all the way we could hear the crowd with the Reindeer yellin' and callin' not fifty yards behind us. You know it always was a race between us and the Reindeer and we usually got the best of it."

John Brawn looked helplessly off at the dimming sky.

"When we come to Twenty-eighth Street where the road branches off to the right and goes down to the New Albany Bridge—it's quite a steep hill—some one calls out, 'There she is!' and we all looked and sure enough there was the fire all right but it was over across the river—over in Albany.—Well, that lets us out. And we were all slackin' up when Asa Brawn yells, 'Let's go to her anyhow, boys.'—And we did, although it weren't any of our affair, New Albany havin' a fire department of her own."

Mr. McBurney paused and drew forth an ancient quill toothpick from a vest pocket and reflectively picked his teeth.

"You ain't ever been down that Twenty-eighth Street hill, have you?"

Brawn admitted he had not.

"Well, I reckon that was before your time. It's all built up now. Well—none of us realized what a grade that was down to the bridge, that is not till we got to rollin'. We hadn't got more nor fifty feet before we realized it. I had a holt on the rope up near the head and on the right side. And directly the boys commenced to drop off. The pace was too hot for 'em. There was about thirty with the old Hope that night. About halfway down the hill I says to myself, 'Reckon you can keep up with the machine so's she

won't run over you?' For we were goin' pretty near as fast as a horse can run and gainin' every minute.—And then all of a sudden I saw the lights of the bridge ahead and I done some quick thinkin'. You see the bridge was divided in two parts—a right and left—and in the middle were a stone buttress dividin' the two sides so's nobody could make a mistake of drivin' on the wrong side. And over to the right the banks of the river looked mighty black and mighty deep. And the space for us to run through was mighty slim—looked like we would 'a' had a close squeak. And behind me I heard the boys a-shoutin' and a-yellin' and the drag rope was a-draggin' on the ground behind me, and I could hear the old Hope rollin' and bumpin' along. And I says to myself, 'Here's where you drops out.' And I gave a run and a jump and lit in the bushes on the side of the road. And just as I looked up I see the old Hope go swingin' past, with her tongue dippin' up and down just like she was a-scoopin' up sand." The old man paused a moment for breath and John Brawn waited silently for him to go on.

Mr. McBurney then looked up into the young man's face impressively. "There weren't but one man left on that whole machine.—And that man were—Asa Brawn.—He had holt of the tongue by the ring, on the right side and he were runnin' along, leapin' and slidin' and I could see him watchin' the road. And I hollers to him to keep to the right as fur as possible, cause the road just naturally tipped a bit the other way, and he was gone, a-windin' down the road. And I set there and I waited. And I waited and I listened but I didn't hear no crash. And directly some of the boys came a-runnin' up, breathin' hard and askin' a thousand



excited questions. And when I got my breath I went on down the road and out on the bridge. And there weren't no signs of a wreck, but I tell you it were a narrer squeak, for the road were mighty narrer and the old Hope goin' so fast. And by and by we came on Asa Brawn a-settin' on the edge of the bridge with his feet hangin' over above the water, and he were a-breathin' heavy, and when we come up he turned and grinned at us, like. And down a little further on, the old Hope stood just as quiet as a wind-broken horse."

John Brawn smiled. "Well," he said. "That's a new one. I never heard that one before."

"That were just like Asa Brawn. Not afraid of nothin'. Up to all sorts of deviltry.—He were a good man." He shook his head slowly.

They stood there in silence, together, with the twilight slipping down into the street, and the wisps of smoke curling slowly upward into the steely blue-gray of the sky and the hum of the city about them, and the years seemed to slip away, roll back and leave the city misty and glamorous in its youth, waiting, expectant, for life. A rising eagerness came to John Brawn, a quickening of pulse, a warming about the heart, a little flame of high resolve. He turned and laid a hand on the old man's shoulder.

"Thank you for telling me that story," he said and then he turned to go. And there crashed upon his senses a sudden medley of sounds, dispelling the glamour. There was a shout, a great screaming noise, and then a woman's piercing cry. He turned automatically to look, at the shout. And it all took place before his eyes, impersonal, vague, like the action on a movie screen. He saw a big car come swerving to the curb

and stop. He saw a little bunch of something caught up and rolled like a bundle of rags. He saw a man clamber out of the car and come around in front of it and then he saw a woman come running across the pavement and throw herself upon the man, screaming hideously.

Instantly the street seemed swarming with people and above the excited chatter he could hear the screaming of the woman:

“Lemme at him. Lemme at him. My Gawd, my baby!” And directly two men dragged her back out of the little crowd, and her dress was torn from the upper half of her body. The smooth brown flesh shone like silk in the soft evening light. Her eyes were wild and staring and tears streamed like dry things down her cheeks and her hands clutched convulsively in the air as she was drawn away. Brawn saw her face as she passed. It was the Negress of the balcony, she of the languid, impersonal regard. And then directly some one came out of the crowd holding out a little form away from his body like an unclean thing. It was quite limp and one little leg dangled all askew, and its head hung away. Quite impersonal, too, it seemed. Sam had got too much under foot.

Then there came a man, it was a youngish man, only a boy really, with a very white face and wild-eyed and dishevelled and he asked ceaseless questions in a very dry, hard, shrill voice. And a big man in shirt sleeves and black linen cap held him tightly by the arm.—It all passed before his eyes. And then he felt something tugging away at his arm. As from a great distance he turned and gave heed. Mr. McBurney was whispering to him, a sharp gleam in his eyes. “Go

give 'em your name," he was saying. "Go give 'em your name."

He vaguely heard and understood not at all. Rather impatiently he shook off the hand.

"You're the first on the ground. It'll make a good case. We saw it with our own eyes.—Go on in there and take holt." The old man was tremulously eager.

Brawn's throat went dry and there was a hard, cold lump in his chest. The excited stir of the crowd, the straining, eager faces, the buzz of voices and back in the hollow of the grimy house the muffled, staccato screaming of a woman—became suddenly revolting. "It's not in my line," he said at length and his voice sounded very thin and without conviction.—"Well—I'll bring you those things some day next week.—I must be off." He shouldered his way through the crowd and started off briskly southward along First Street.

Mr. McBurney watched his retreating figure with an odd look of question on his face.

## CHAPTER II

**B**Y THE time Brawn had reached Compton Street the fogs of depression had pretty well scattered. It had likewise got pretty late. Ordinarily he was the sort to take a street car even for short distances, but to-night his perceptions which had been slow to respond persisted in continuing to vibrate and received frequent stimuli from his imagination. On First Street, about two blocks south of Green where the accident had occurred, it had come to him that to make a fight on reckless driving, dangerous traffic of any sort, would be worthy of the most starved ambition. And the raw edge of his nerves lent vigour to that dawning determination, in an excess of mobile feeling. He was working himself up. At Broadway he was vacillating between high resolve and practical discomfort. If it had not been five long blocks back to the scene which would not be dispelled from his memory; if it had not been so late—too late perhaps to find any of the chief actors still upon the scene; if it had not been that such action would have stamped him as a procrastinator with decision, especially in the eyes of his friend Mr. McBurney, he would have turned back and hurled himself relentlessly into the struggle on the side of justice. It was this last reason, really, that held him. His was not a procrastinating nature. On the contrary it responded facilely to



the impulse of the moment. And so when he came to Broadway, he turned west instead of back. And just then a woman waved to him from a stealthy electric that slipped past, around a corner and out of sight. It was just the shadow of a wave, a mere raising of the hand. But then there was the interesting outline of a small head and a small hat, momentarily visible against an uncertain background, a suggestion of elegance, refinement, charm and mystery. For he had not recognized the woman nor the car. And he caught himself standing hat in hand and staring after a shadow, in a quick flash of pleasure. The traffic crusade was forgotten. Traffic presented such a multitude of phases. He continued west on Broadway.

When he opened the door at 517 Compton Street the clock struck the half hour. A woman's figure glided across the orange oblong of an open door, and a draught of air, sucked outward as he closed the door behind him, carried a blend of subtle odours of unfamiliar cookery. "You're pretty late," came in a thin, tremulous voice.

Brawn went to the door, hat and brief case in hand, and stood smiling. "Smells mighty good. Something smells mighty good. Ummmm!—What is it, Mrs. Melton?"

Mrs. Melton looked up over her shoulder from where she stooped before the sideboard and peered at him over her glasses. "If you don't hurry, supper will be all cold, and you can't eat just the smell."

A touch of sharpness in the adjuration checked the light in Brawn's face and he turned to go. "I'll be right down. I'll be right down. Won't take me five

minutes. Won't take me three minutes." He bounded up the steps two at a time, went back along a narrow hall to a rear chamber, opened the door and threw on the light.

On a little table just inside the door was a pile of mail. He picked it up, tucking his hat and portmanteau under his arm. He ran through it cursorily. Then he broke open the first envelope. It contained a bill from a florist. He let it fall upon the floor. He opened the second. It disclosed an engraved announcement of the coming marriage of a Miss Elise Bainbridge to a Mr. Baker of Toledo. He let it fall after the first. Then came a statement from a haberdasher with the epigram, "To account rendered"; then a bill from a candy shop, another from the Louisville Taxicab Company which followed its predecessors with an impatient fluttering, and finally a more serious-looking document of much greater promise. Brawn opened it reflectively. It was a brief statement from his club advising him that he had been posted.

Brawn walked slowly over to a desk, laid his hat upon it carefully, and then stepped over to a far wall and hung his brief case on a hook there. Trouble darkened his face. "Wonder what they sent that for?" he said aloud and then stared at the ceiling with knitted brows. "Twenty-four fifty, twelve, and five—that makes—only forty-one—they're wrong," he added with decision. And then he walked over to his dresser and stared at himself in the glass.

"Mr. Brawn!—Mr. Brawn!—Your five minutes are up," came a voice from below.

Brawn started. "Be right down," he called. And then he walked slowly to the bathroom and directly



there came the sound of water running and a vigorous sloshing and splashing.

When finally he entered the dining room with shining face and sleekly brushed hair the clock struck seven and Mrs. Melton looked up at him reproachfully. "You men are all alike," she said.

"Aw now, Mrs. Melton. You mustn't put us all in a class like that. Some of us are quite distinctive."

"Some of you are later than others.—What will you have—the outside piece or do you like it a little more rare?—This was a good roast, but I'm afraid it's all dried out standing in the oven so long."

"How are you, Mrs. Hocker? You're looking perter to-night, seems to me.—Oh, any part will do, Mrs. Melton.—The heel looks pretty good," said Brawn. Mrs. Hocker went primly on with the business of eating as though that operation were a matter of reflection rather than brazen enjoyment.

"I just witnessed another bit of wasteful carelessness," said Brawn at length, to his plate. "Automobile ran over a little nigger down on First Street.—Tried to pass a wagon on the wrong side."

The two ladies looked up, their repose broken.

"Terrible thing," said Brawn.

"I'm afraid to go in town any more," Mrs. Hocker put in. She was an unobtrusive woman in her fifties, with mild gray eyes, a soft fluff of graying hair piled high on her head with a roll in front, and fingers that plucked.

"But you're willing to take a chance, aren't you—every now and then?" interjected Brawn, his mouth full of roast and potatoes and with a wink at Mrs. Melton.

"Not any more than I can help," replied Mrs. Hocker severely, and then the door bell rang.

For a moment there was silence and then Mrs. Melton's voice from the hall:

"Did you order a taxicab, Mr. Brawn?"

Brawn laid his napkin down. He looked at the wall and scowled. "Tell him to wait.—Why, it isn't time yet. I told him to come at seven forty-five and," looking at his watch, "it isn't but seven fifteen—seven twenty." He rose to his feet and with his napkin trailing went to the door. "Say," he said to the dim shadow of the driver, "you're early. Not till a quarter to eight. Come back in about—but wait a minute.—I'll be ready in a minute.—Just wait." And he turned and started up the steps, calling over his shoulder as he went:

"Excuse me, Mrs. Melton. Excuse me, Mrs. Hocker. I forgot all about——" His voice trailed off in the depths of the upstairs and then a door banged. Mrs. Melton faced about and had a few words with the figure on the door step. There was a rumble of a low, protesting voice and then Mrs. Melton closed the door.

She came back in the dining room and sat down. And then she looked at Mrs. Hocker at the other end of the table and Mrs. Hocker looked at her—in silence. And the clock's ticking began again. The boarder's napkin hung on the back of his chair.

At eight o'clock John Brawn came down the stairs once more. He was as sleek and bright as a newly minted coin. His overcoat hung partly open and through the slight gap in his muffler showed the tips of a high-standing collar. He wore a high silk hat,

pushed a little too far back on his head, and he was pulling on a pair of new white gloves with evident enjoyment.

"Well, good-night, everybody," he called as he descended the stairs. "Shall I take the key—or leave it under the rug?"

Mrs. Melton's voice answered something unintelligible from the depths of the kitchen; the lights of the dining room had been turned out.

He paused at the foot of the stairs, finished off his glove-fitting with a click of the fastener, gazed at himself in the hall mirror, gave a twitch to the muffler about his neck and stood with his hand on the door knob. Already he had forgotten about the key. "Good-night, everybody," he called again.

About five minutes later the car stopped before a dim, forbidding house that was dark save for a single light in the hall. Brawn got out and went up to the door. He rang the bell and in a moment a muffled figure came and opened it. He was conscious of an exotic scent that was foreign and bizarre and as definite as a presence in the gush of warm air that came forth.

"Well!" he said brightly. "Ready?—a paragon!—A paradox! Woman on time.—Isn't that delightful!"

"You're late," she answered in a deep, full voice. "Here!—Give me your hand. It's terribly dark." The door slammed. "I told Jasper to put in a new globe this morning.—Look out for the step—there's another one when you think you're down." She gathered up her skirts and, lightly touching his arm, felt her way down to the paving and went with him to the



curb. "That's old stuff about women," she said as he helped her into the car.

She seated herself in the far corner and composed her wraps. Brawn came after and sat back and regarded her. About her shoulders was a luxurious swathing of dark blue velvet, surmounted by a collar of white fox, and above that the gleam of satiny hair in smooth golden waves and undulations, a sparkling eye and the tip of a provoking nose. Before her stretched her feet in sleek stockings that might have been painted on, so flawless was their smoothness. New black satin slippers with high heels were propped against the partition. Brawn's eyes travelled quickly.

"Turn off the light, can't you?" she said. "I hate these showcases."

Brawn did so. "Shall I pull down the curtains too?" He laughed slyly.

"I don't think that's necessary—just yet," she said and turned and gazed with indifference out of the window. "How far is this place anyway? It's an unearthly hour to be starting to a party."

"It's about six miles out. That's why I said to be ready at eight."

"You said seven thirty, *mon pauvre*.—And I've missed my supper and angered my family and you were thirty minutes late."

"Why, Phil. I think you're mistaken. Mrs. Watson said eight thirty and I thought thirty minutes would be enough. It's a buffet supper you know and——"

"You said seven thirty."

He was silent for a moment, wondering how it could have happened. "Got a new coat, haven't you?"

She turned suddenly. "Yes.—Like it?—I struck Arthur for the raise yesterday. Told him if he wanted me to step off, I'd have to have the equipment. It's this winter or never, Job. And this is the opening gun."

Her tone struck into him a silence. He was still bothering about the misunderstanding in the time. He prided himself on being exact, or rather on other people's being exact. Sometimes mistakes would happen. For quite a while they rolled along with neither saying a word. He did not like her to talk like that, either. And then the interior of the car began to get a little warm and the scent from her hair and her clothes began to reach him, lulling him. The soft purr of the wheels on the asphalt, the flicker of lights, the blur of shade through the window persisted in a soothing and monotonous fashion and Brawn settled back against the cushion and yielded to their importuning.

"You might say you're sorry," she said at length.

"I am. I am sorry."

Pause.

"Well. I guess I'll forgive you. But you've no idea how fatal it is for an old girl to get to a party early.—Hard enough to keep from going stale as it is.—You'll notice how all the fresh young things drift in so casually about twelve o'clock when all the others are jaded and the men rush to them just like they do to the bar."

"I'm getting tired of parties," said Brawn.

"What one is this—your one thousand and oneth night? You're a gilded moth, Job."

Her manner irritated him. He probably had been



late but he did not like her scoffing tone. She had a bad habit that way. "Moths get caught in the flame. You'll never hear of that happening to me. And besides that, I'm through. Last year was the last. This year—one or two parties just to keep people from getting sore and then no more. I know. This running about gets you nowhere. Not a thing in the world. And it's time I was looking out for number one. I'll be thirty next spring."

"Really? You sound like fifty. Well, not for me. When once you're old, you're old for life. I'm going to fight to the bitter end. Don't let old man Melancholy get you by the throat, Job."

He was getting even more irritated. Why had he let himself be talked into going to this party? He had thought that Phyllida might appreciate going but apparently she was taking it as a matter of course. He had told her eight o'clock. He was sure now.

"Not that I've got any kick coming. And a lawyer has to keep up his social connections.—But what's four or five thousand a year?"

"A very respectful sum. Take my hat off to it any time. Don't scorn the money, Job."

He sank back into an unhappy reverie. Came the sudden screeching of the brakes. "One gets pretty tired of law." And then he saw that they were stopping before a spacious porch flooded with light. A broad colonial door with a brass knocker and a fan-shaped transom was in the centre foreground. The door opened to a glare of light and the strumming of string music within.

"Well, here's to it, Job. There's the front,"

she said. "I'll forgive you utterly, Job. The thought of action sweeps all rancour from my heart."

Her tone was so natural and merry again that he laughed. And then he crawled past her and helped her alight from the cab. They went up the steps together, silently—past an old darky in a dinner coat and a spotless white shirt.

There was the momentary confusion of entrance. On the right of the spacious hall was a room ablaze with light and humming with people; on the left, another room, carpeted and dim, where a few men stood idly about, in vivid contrast with its antipode. As they crossed the hall, a man came toward them, his hands in his pockets. "Hello, Phil," he said, and then nodded shortly to Brawn. He came and laid his hand gently upon the girl's shoulder as she paused at the foot of the stair, thereby placing himself between the couple and in Brawn's way in case the latter wished likewise to ascend the stairs. He wore a dinner coat, very trim, very modish, a low, turn-down collar, and his trousers were rather short. His hair was sleek and black and glossy and parted in the middle and not a strand of it was out of its most proper place. "You're easy on the eyes to-night, old lady," he said to the girl and held her by the elbow, preventing her from going on. "Hurry up and come down.—This was a bum steer. They were playing the funeral march just before you came in."

Brawn reached out and pushed him aside. He was not so tall as the intruder, but a bit stockier, and not nearly so comfortable-looking in his elegance. "Run along, Jerry," he said. "Look after the little girls."

The man turned and regarded him vacuously and

Brawn took advantage of the opportunity and sprang up the steps after Phil. He had barely reached the landing, whence the stair branched off to the right, when he heard a laugh, a clear, derisive laugh, and then Jerry called out after him:

"Why don't you take off your shoes, too, Brawn?"

He paused and looked back, grinning, but not understanding.

Jerry stood at the bottom of the stairs. He raised one foot and touched it with his finger. "Look at yourself," he said.

Brawn was conscious of a number of faces in the hallway turning toward him, and then he glanced down at his foot. A disagreeable, cold shock of surprise struck him that was like a douche of water. Above his patent leather pump, right in the seam, his sock had let go, disclosing a long narrow slit. It was black treachery for he had worn it only once before. His face grew red with chagrin and dismay as he started up the stairs once more.

"The other one, too," Jerry called again and laughed. And there were other laughs, light, feathery, wind-blown, careless.

Instinctively Brawn caught a look at the other foot, but a glance was enough and he did not expose himself to further ridicule. He hurried up the stair and did not hear his companion when she took leave of him in the upper hall.

### CHAPTER III

**I**T WAS fifteen minutes or more before he came out of dry dock. The host had been sent for and had produced a pair of socks which were unfortunately cotton but fortunately whole. He apologized for their texture, saying that all his clothes were in a chiffonier in the ladies' dressing room. But Brawn was not particular. He scarcely noticed them and pulled them over his others with a muttered curse at his haberdasher.

He went out again into the upstairs hall and waited around the door of the ladies' dressing room, and the echo of the laughter still rang in his ears, and an ugly little hot spot hovered about his heart. He had always had rough edges toward Jerry Cloud; he was always so obviously humorous. A shallow pate on a high horse! Phil did not come. He waited. She thought him a fool too, perhaps. He looked at his watch and did not see what time it was—merely looked at the dial. Then he went over to the banister and looked down. The door of the dressing room opened and two girls came forth, strangers to him, and he watched them go downstairs with that characteristic hesitating step and cross the floor out of his sight. Still Phil did not come. He looked at his watch again and then, with a sudden burst of anger, started down the stairs.

When he reached the bottom, the hallway was



empty; the crowd had all gathered in the room on the right and something was going on in there. He caught a careless look around the corner of the stairs and then backed away. Off in a dim nook on a bit of a wall bench almost hidden by a potted palm, he had caught a glimpse of Phil's golden head, and beside it and rather close, the sleek one of Jerry Cloud. Something choked in his throat.

He fancied he saw Phil make as if to rise, but he stepped into the ballroom, as if he had not. At the far end Collis Temple was showing off his shadow tricks against a white sheet; all heads were turned that way. He had no interest in shadow pictures—was cold to Collis Temple.

A fairylike little creature in a simple white dress that was hardly more than a child's smock came from the crowd and approached him, peering abstractedly into corners. It was Arna Joline, with her ridiculous, tiny feet, her golden fluff, and her look of childish perplexity.

She tripped across the floor. She came quite near him. She realized his presence with a start. "Oh! Hello, John.—I've lost my fan, I believe.—I—I've ——" She caught a look around the corner of the door, paused and turned back. A faint shadow seemed to touch her face. She gave him a careful smile. "Have you seen Collis's animals? The one of the grampus and the little boy? It's a scream." As she looked into his eyes he fancied he could see many things in hers—upset and self-conscious though he was: Arna—she with the features of a bisque doll. "Let's go watch," she said.

He followed her dully and stood for a moment on



the edge of the crowd. Bursts of laughter and applause came like crackles against his brain. Over a shoulder he could catch occasional glimpses of the grotesquely jerking shadows—hideously childish. Before him was the slim form of Arna Joline, stretching her head and standing uncertainly on tip-toe. Every now and then she would turn around to him and smile—a vacant, woodeny smile. She had lost her fan, perhaps. Yes, he knew what she had lost. A year ago there had been an ugly scandal—just a quivering hot breath of scandal. A man and a girl had been found in an empty house way out on the Brownsboro Road. It was a traffic policeman or “motor cycle cop” who found them. Somebody like that. He didn’t remember. Nothing came of it. They established a perfect alibi: their car had gone dead on them and they were merely stopping for shelter from the coming rain. But it had been very late and the tale had been very suggestive, lingering like a bit of mist in the lowlands for a long time afterwards. It was known that the man was Jerry Cloud. And it had been whispered somewhere that the girl was—Arna Joline. But no one seemed to be sure. And Jerry Cloud had gone on as though nothing had happened. And Arna Joline still went to the parties. Only, the two of them were never together. She seemed to slip about like some fluttering white moth—uncertain of herself. And there was that vague way about her; one could not tell if she were really enjoying herself. She merely went all the time—round and round and round. And to-night she had lost her fan and forgotten that she had lost it.

Brawn reached forward and lifted her gently by her

elbows. He could hear her laugh. Then she twisted, seemed uncomfortable, and he let her down again. The picture show broke up. The crowd surged about them. He had lost Arna Joline.

He walked to the front door without looking in the stair corner. He went out upon the porch. He pulled out his cigarette case, extracted a cigarette, lighted it, and leaned back against one of the big stone pillars, to enjoy himself.

Some time later he went back indoors. They were dancing. He caught sight of Phyllida whirling by. She waved at him with her fan and he smiled back—like a wooden image.

Just when they had had supper, he did not know. He was not hungry anyway. He smoked up nearly two packs of cigarettes on the big front porch and up and down the drive.

He danced one short round with Phyllida but she said nothing and neither did he.

When they went home, he handed her into the car and waited for the Warrens, a young married couple who had arranged to share the taxi with them. He could feel her looking at him from the darkness. He was suddenly angry and resentful that a girl of her age could so obviously play with fire as she did. He could not understand why she did it unless—— And she was older than Cloud, most probably. Every one knew what sort he was. He carried his label openly—like a glass bottle in shipment: "Handle with care."

There was much merriment in the car going home, for the Warrens were a live young couple, and he enjoyed himself, but he knew all the time——

When he left her at the door, she held out her hand.

"I don't know what's come over you to-night. One might think I had done something to you. I ought to be very angry with you."

"Yes. Perhaps you should. I'm pretty hard to get along with. I'm sorry. Good-night."

She laughed suddenly. "Sometimes you are, Job! Did I—have I—done anything to hurt your feelings?"

"No," he lied. "Only sometimes I worry about you. You—you need a brother."

"Oh ho!—Well," and her voice went somehow softer, "it's sweet to be worried about—sometimes. But what about, Job, my venerable?"

"Well, never mind that."

She pressed his hand and let it fall. "Don't lose sleep over me, Job. You need your health.—For your own encouragement, too, you're an interesting study. I—— Run along. Your meter is gasping its last out there."

"Good-night."

He walked soberly down the walk to the car.

## CHAPTER IV

**B**RAWN sat with his feet propped on the low window sill and rocked his swivel chair slowly back and forth in a short arc. There was nothing in prospect and the view from his office window was far from encouraging. A thin line of umbrellas, sleek as seals' backs in the drizzle, was coming from the court-house door, down Jefferson Street. The sky was an impenetrable gray. It was a most inopportune day in which to come to grips with discouragement.

The telephone rang. Slowly and sullenly he answered its summons.

"Mr. Brawn's office?" said a voice.

"John Brawn talking."

"Oh yes. Job, this is Phil.—I'm not disturbing you, am I?"

"No. Not at all."

"Well"—a pause—"Gee!—Why don't you say something?—Here! I'll get it out of my system and evaporate." There was a light, hard little resonance in the voice. "I just wanted to invite you to dinner. Hadn't expected to be formal about it——"

"Yes?"

"What in the world is the matter, Job? Trouble hasn't come into your life at last, has it? Or is it that you still——"

Brawn laughed, a short, hard laugh. He tilted his



head to one side and looked abstractedly at the ceiling. "I—a—it's nothing.—Had my mind on my work.—Pardon me."

"Well.—I'm relieved.—As I was saying, just wanted you to come to dinner Friday.—Seven o'clock."

"Mmm," said Brawn, slowly. "'Fraid I can't. I've——"

"Job."

"Yes?"

"Listen. Don't be so inexorable. Think. Friday night? You know you haven't a date."

A pause. "I——"

"Don't think you have to punish me, Job. I'm perfectly conscious of my sins.—Seven o'clock——"

"I'm not trying to punish you. What should I be punishing you for, Phil?" His tone was growing lighter; a smile was struggling about his mouth, but his eyes were uncertain.

"There!—That's better. Remember what Portia said about mercy. We'll expect you then—seven o'clock."

Brawn laughed. "You must expect a Shylock—coming for a pound of flesh—and on Friday?"

"That's good. You'll come then? Must hurry along." There was a slight click.

"Phil!"—"Phil!" Brawn jiggled the receiver but there was no reply. Slowly he pushed the phone from him. The smile hovered about his lips but his eyes were thoughtful . . .

Friday night at seven fifteen, Brawn was hurrying up the front walk of the Coleman home. As he punched the bell button with a quick, nervous gesture,



a restraining impulse came to him. He must quiet his mood, still the racing in his veins. He had a certain responsibility—a responsibility of not taking things too lightly. He could be pleasant and agreeable to the uttermost bounds of politeness but it must be definitely understood that he was no catchpenny, no trifling bauble, to be treated lightly. But the quickening of his nerves and perceptions would not thus easily be subdued. He caught himself listening acutely as he waited, so he turned in the vestibule and casually viewed the arc light, swinging at the street corner. He would not be trifled with. By no means. And then the door opened.

Phyllida May stood in the doorway, and Brawn's cold, calm dignity started to slip. He snatched off his hat. Words failed him. Phyllida, too, was silent; he could not see her face for the light behind her. He stepped into the hall, conscious, as he did so, of a most demoralizing flutter of his nerves. He felt that she was looking him over from the shadow. It was an unfair advantage.

"How do you do! How do you do!" he whispered as he passed her, bowing with short, jerky little bows in cadence with his words. He walked over to a table and put his hat upon it. And then he turned and looked at her, peeling off his gloves the while. The light fell full on her face and burnished the gold of her hair. She was regarding him gravely from under levelled brows, a suggestion of mock seriousness about her mouth.

"Well?" said Brawn. It was a pitiful striving for the desired mood.

Phyllida broke into a sudden laugh and then she

came and took him by the arm and propelled him toward the door across the hall. "You'll be the death of me yet, Job," she said.

As they stepped into the parlour a man's figure arose from a divan in the corner.

"You've met Mr. Ambrose, Job?"

"Howdy, John."

"How are you, George?"

"Oh, I see," said Phyllida. "Banal, as ever, aren't I?" She sat down in a large armchair in the centre of the room while Brawn and the third party sought remote corners.

There was a moment of silence, during which time Brawn strove to order his confused feelings, and then Phyllida turned to Ambrose as if in continuation of a past discussion:

"But *I* say, George, that she had a perfect right to her freedom. A contract's a contract and when it's broken, it's not.—We were discussing the Knowles," she explained to Brawn.—"I said I thought Justine was perfectly right. Lost his mind, you know." She paused and looked down at her lap and smoothed a ribbon end. Brawn watched her closely and wondered what he had been let into. He could not help feeling resentful at the presence of a third person and a little chill travelled up and down his spine. She was an entrancing creature but one could not count on her. It occurred to him that he was called on to speak.

"But," he began, slowly—the half light was more bewitching on Phyllida's hair than a bright, full one—"I thought she was in love with Bill Jordan?"

Phyllida looked up quickly. "She was. And probably is. But that's beside the point. Henry Knowles

is no longer the man she married. He went bad on her. The law is definite in some states, isn't it? It ought to be. For my part, if my man lost his *money*, it would be cause enough for Me to leave him." Her laugh tinkled off, sank to a low, musical note.

"Phil!" interposed Brawn. "You oughtn't to talk that way."

"And why not?" She looked up at him sharply.

"Because—well, you don't mean it. We're not animals. Civilization has made some progress."

"Civilization hasn't anything to do with it. It's just common sense." She turned to Ambrose for support: "Dispassionately now—I marry a man. He disappears—changes—goes flooey. He's not the man I married—never can be again. Where's the idea of justice?—You're not a prejudiced lawyer, George. Answer me. What about that?"

Ambrose raised his beetling brows. "'For richer, for poorer. In sickness and in health.'—That's what you would have said." He smiled at her.

"Pouf! But suppose I weren't married in a church?"

Ambrose was silent a moment, scowling. When he spoke, his voice was very low. "You wouldn't be married, then."

Phyllida flung out her hand in a protesting gesture. "Oh, you two! You won't argue fairly. You take things for granted."

"One has to," rejoined Ambrose and then he sprang awkwardly to his feet.

A woman was entering the room. It was Mrs. Coleman. Spying Ambrose, she swept toward him impressively. Her manner was elaborately studied.



She raised her eyebrows as she held out her hand. "Oh, how do you do?" she said, her face uptilted, her eyes thoughtful. It was the manner of a beautiful woman.

"Here's John Brawn, Mama," said Phyllida.

Mrs. Coleman turned. She caught a quick glance at her daughter which seemed to say, "How came all these people here? What is the idea?" She held out her hand to Brawn who bowed over it. Her manner faded; she seemed to become weary. Then she sat down in the focal chair and arranged her skirts. Every now and then she would glance at Ambrose, who sat viewing his great hands. "What were you talking about?" she said. "Go on, please. Don't let me interrupt."

No one replied for the moment. Brawn from the far corner was gazing out with restless eyes.

Directly Ambrose assumed the responsibility. "We were discussing the Knowles affair," he explained. "Phil was saying that she thought marriage a contract and that the considerations were material. Of course \_\_\_\_\_"

Mrs. Coleman smiled, showing the tip of a gold crown. "That's just what it is—pure and simple. If more of the parties to it only recognized that fact, there would be much less trouble. Give and take! One does the giving and the other the taking—ordinarily."

She laid it down as a fact and Ambrose subsided. A reserve had settled upon the room; all seemed to centre on the woman in the easy chair. She sat, breathing audibly, her full bosom rising and falling under an ornate waist. One hand drummed the arm of the



chair. The nails were glittering and pink, with long, pointed, white tips. The powder lay in drifts upon her face—along the curve of her full neck.

Suddenly she smiled again, a flash of a smile. “Why I should be talking like this with my daughter in the room and—and possible suitors—I don’t know. I can’t imagine what I was thinking about.”

Brawn stirred and Ambrose looked up, smiling faintly.

Mrs. Coleman gave a wave of the hand. “Too much is said of that sort of thing anyway.—What is it the essayist said—‘Vice is a monster of such hateful mien’—?”

Again a silence. Brawn from his corner was wondering. Mrs. Coleman had not escaped the burden of communal conspirings. Her reputation had had some storms to weather. The best of her friends claimed that she had suffered disillusion. Her first husband, Edward May, Phyllida’s father, had been a semi-romantic figure. He had been teller in a bank—slim, graceful, and a beautiful dancer. The girls had called him, “that beautiful Ed May.” To Janet McBride he had been irresistible—insatiate, curious, groping spirit that she was. Against common sense, she had become Janet May and loud had been the whisperings and sombre the shakings of heads. Acidulous tongues found satisfaction in that a marriage of the sort was waste to neither. Before the girl had had time to reflect upon her action, Edward May had been taken from her—run down by a careless trolley car. All he had left was a somewhat roseate memory. And the gaunt problem of subsistence had bobbed up again.

There had been a certain rugged strength in the way

she had recognized her facts. Before the public had ceased being sorry for her she took definite steps for the feathering of her nest, a precaution made all the more necessary because of the inopportune arrival of a fledgling. A year later she married Arthur Coleman, an assertive and colourful salesman of ladies' underwear. Of course he was a social cipher and *gauche*, but he was prosperous, without question. Again tongues had wagged. Scurrilously it was whispered that the two of them had taken the baby honeymooning. Brawn, watching from his corner, and before whose mental eyes passed the whole scene again, in detail, shivered at the thought. He glanced at Phil, a fairy changeling in a sordid story.

"No," Mrs. Coleman was saying, a look of significant, arch slyness upon her bepowdered face. "I can't imagine what I could be thinking about. Bachelors are never interested in the abstract idea of divorce. Only in divorcées. Phyllida, forgive me dear." She gazed dreamily about the room. She seemed consumed with ill-repressed amusement. Ambrose looked up from his hands, smiled slowly at her, and settled back against his cushion.

"The cynicisms of the parent need not be visited upon the child," he said. "Nothing you might say, I fancy, would in the least impair your daughter's chances."

Mrs. Coleman bowed.

"Thank you, George," Phyllida murmured.

And Brawn, on the verge of speech, paused, mouth open. No one was looking his way. A quick little wave of envy passed over him. He was not so old, so well established as Ambrose. Not nearly so secure.

The room was full of odd silences. Every one seemed to depend on the woman there in the centre for his cues. Again she broke the silence: "The Knowles girl—so she is really applying for her divorce?"

"So they say," responded Ambrose.

"Ah well. *Que voulez-vous?*—To be tied to an idiot at thirty—with ten years of youth ahead—all dressed up and no place to go, to use an obvious vulgarity. I don't blame her. It seems her only insurance."

Brawn wondered how much of Phyllida's philosophy had been unconscious echo. The thought of an echo at all, oppressed him. Mrs. Coleman was a wise, vulgar woman, and she did not think him worth bothering about.

"By the way, dearie," she turned to her daughter. "Saw Jeremiah Cloud this afternoon in Presswick's with a very pretty young girl. The young Butterworth thing, I believe. He was treating her to a drink at one of those little tables in the rear and his eyes were just eating her up. I happened to see them."

"Oh. Such a blow!" said Phil.

"I knew it would be. I merely wanted to warn you.—Mr. Cushman, Jerry's uncle, I see, has effected a merger of three or four insurance companies. 'Merge and conquer.' What financier said that?"

"Clever head," said Ambrose.

"They're all small companies," interposed Brawn from his corner. "The three of them together don't make one good one."

There was a pause after his speech—an awkward, frightfully silent pause. He hadn't meant to say that



at all. It broke a long silence from him. It sounded very much as if—— And then they all laughed.

“Just the same,” put in Mrs. Coleman maliciously, “you cannot overlook Mr. Cloud.” And they all laughed again with relieved gaiety.

Just then the folding doors opened and a grinning face thrust itself through and remained there, a black mask with a double row of yellow white teeth.

“Yes, Jasper?” said Mrs. Coleman. “Dinner is served,” she continued, appropriating the lines. And then she rose to her feet.

The doors were got open somehow and the party filed through into a dining room that was totally dark save for a huge dome of vari-coloured glass that hung over and near the table. A little girl in a white dress came through the door from the hall.

“This is Mary,” said Mrs. Coleman, putting her hand in momentary caress upon the child’s head. “My little daughter, Mary. . . . Did you have a nice time at the party, dear?”

The child murmured something unintelligible and then slid into a chair.

“Wait, dearie. Not before the others, dear. Mr. Ambrose, take this place. Mr. er—a—there. Arthur was called away last night. Most unexpectedly. He’d just come in from a long business trip and I thought——Pull your chair up closer to the table, sweetheart. I do wish he would make up his mind to go in business in Louisville but he says they make it so profitable for him.—Thank you, Mr. Brawn. Now don’t wriggle, sweetheart.”

Brawn found himself directly across the table from Phyllida, and as she pulled up her chair she gave him



such an understanding sort of smile that he warmed all over and felt quite cheery and jolly. It was a "home-folksey" place—no ostentation. And Phyllida, with her golden hair and her piquant nose and her delicate colouring, the soft roundness of her white arms—oh, well, it would be a lucky man who could hold her entirely—absorbingly.

The meal started in silence and then suddenly conversation sprang up about politics. It began as Jasper was dealing out the salad with his long, gingerly reach. "I think it's a shame," said Mrs. Coleman, "that you good Democrats don't clean house. The Catholics have the party in the hollow of their hand. Why—they hold all the offices."

Phyllida and Brawn exchanged glances.

"Why is it, Mr. Ambrose?" she continued.

Ambrose wiped his mouth with his napkin, deliberately spread it in his lap and then looked across the table at his hostess. "I don't know, Mrs. Coleman. I didn't realize it.—I'm a Catholic, you know."

Brawn rose on whirring wings; his heart warmed to the necessity that was calling him. "They're the only people who seem to take sufficient interest, Mrs. Coleman."

Mrs. Coleman raised her eyebrows in comic dismay. She laid her hand across her mouth and looked over it at Ambrose. "My, oh my," she ventured at length in muffled tones. "What can be coming over you, Jennie?—Oh, there is no excuse for me whatever.—There's nothing I can say, Mr. Ambrose, except that there was nothing personal intended. Absolutely nothing. I can't think what——"

Ambrose laughed graciously. "Perhaps not an idle

truth at that, Mrs. Coleman. Where there's smoke there's fire. You wouldn't be noticing it, if there weren't some truth in the observation.—And you're right in a way, too, Brawn."

Brawn caught a quick look at his hostess. He could not fathom her. Some people said she was a light woman. But she had poise; she did not seem the least disturbed. Already her mind seemed elsewhere. She apparently had no feeling about her "break" at all.

Phyllida arose. "Let's have our coffee in the sitting room," she said.

And they all filed back through the double doors again.

Mrs. Coleman paused in the doorway. Again that distraught manner. "You'll pardon me, I trust. I've some letters that have just got to be answered.—Phil, dear, I can count on you to entertain the gentlemen?"

The gentlemen murmured faint protest.

"Good-night." She seemed to address Ambrose solely.

They sat down. To Brawn's delight, Phyllida came and sat beside him on the divan in the corner. He had speciously plotted to secure it.

The light was warm and red in the sitting room and there were entrancing shadows. Dim lights are like tact; Phyllida had made the most of the idea in her mother's house. Equidistant from the four walls was a table, passably plain. In the middle of the wall opposite the door and beside which stood the divan was a cabinet mantel with an inlay of mottled green tiles and much brass scroll work. There was no way to hide it. Over in the far corner by the door was an ancient

upright piano that insidiously gathered dust. Its voice was gone but it added tone to the room, in the opinion of Mrs. Coleman. Three mongrel chairs filled the empty corners.

In one of these sat Ambrose. He seemed to have shrunk into his collar, though his broad shoulders humped out and his legs were sprawling. Ambrose was a solid sort of man that one accepted without consideration. He was district representative for a large bottle-manufacturing plant, was on good terms with the liquor interests and played politics unostentatiously. On this occasion he seemed a bit self-contained.

"I neglected to give Mama her cues, George," Phyllida began when they were all settled again.

Ambrose grinned. But somehow, the sparkle in her tone did not prove warming and a long silence settled and persisted. Conversation would lift a languid head and die away again. Brawn was quite content to leave things as they were. He was turning over his practical problems and possibilities in a sort of warm, mental haze.

Directly, Ambrose stood up to go. "I told you," he said to Phyllida, "I'd have to eat and run. I'm sorry. It's cosy in here. But I've a pressing business engagement."

Brawn had an indistinct impression of his leaving, but he was acutely aware of Phyllida's return to the divan.

"George is a dear," she began as she snuggled back in a corner among the cushions. "But there isn't any kick in having him around, somehow."

"You're not giving me an inside tip, are you?"

suggested Brawn, for the moment pleased with himself.

She did not seem to have heard him, but leaned back with her hands behind her head and looked dreamily at him. The lines of her body, the gentle curve of her throat, the sweep of the arms—were very graceful.

"I didn't know you knew Ambrose," he said after a bit.

She started, smiled from her reverie. "Oh, ages."

Brawn frowned. "Fine chap. Solid. Substantial. Makes a lot of money. Can't understand, though, why he goes to all the parties. Along with all those doddering relics like Mason and Stout and Doc Spencer." He laughed unpleasantly. "I'm a great one to talk. Go myself. Every chance. And I'm old enough to know better."

"Your age seems to be bothering you a lot these days, Job."

"It ought to. When I look at Ambrose."

"That's not nice."

"Oh, I don't mean that. When I see how far he's gotten, I mean."

"Why. Has he gotten so far?"

"Far enough. I'd swap incomes with him." He was slowly flicking at his foot with a piece of string which he had picked up on the hearth.

"Since when have you adopted that standard?"

He looked up quickly. "Oh, some time ago. I've just decided that all boys make the same mistake. Come to the city with high ideals and a lot to work for. And they end up by going frankly after the mazuma."

"You sound bitter."



"Not at all. It's funny, that's all—when I remember how I came to Louisville and took up the practice of law; and what fine hatred I had in my heart for the ambulance chasers, poor devils. And I thought that mere brains and eloquence would blaze a way for me. Why, do you know," he went on, frankly reminiscent, "that I had two medals for oratory from Centre?"

"Did you now, Job?"

"Yeah. And one of them, the last one, I got in a most terrible—after a most terrible experience."

"No?"

"I've never told anybody. They used to try to kid me about it. It was at commencement. I had a rattling good speech. But I forgot it. Right in the middle I forgot it. For the life of me I could not remember. I was so sure of it I had not brought my manuscript. Right up in the air, I was. Somebody laughed, back in the hall. Drove everything right out of my head worse than ever. So I got down off the stage and went home."

Phyllida laughed. "Those were the days. Didn't you stay for your diploma?"

"Surely I did. I came back. But I got that speech first. And they let me start all over. I finished it that time."

"That was stubborn of you. Poor audience! Those commencement speeches are hard to bear."

"I know. But that isn't all. I won. They gave me the medal. Sorry for me, I guess."

The lightsome, eerie expression on Phyllida's face changed. "Oh," she said. "Why, that's fine.—I didn't know that, Job. I hadn't heard that one."

He seemed to disregard her. "It doesn't matter.

What does matter is—I'm changed. The world's not that sort of a place. There's nothing worth while taking that much trouble for—except money. And somehow I can't work up much of a fever over that. Haven't got enough."

"Oooooe, but you're low. If I had anything in the house I'd give you a drink. Just to save your life. Let's see. Is there——"

"Oh, don't bother. I'm not low at all. Just disillusioned."

"Gone to pieces. All—all to pieces."

"It's a fact. I'm not low at all. Rather philosophical about it. This thing about personal economic freedom is all bunk."

"I don't get the 'personal economic freedom.' "

"Well, that's something else. But this fellow Ambrose is all right. Stick to him. He's got the right idea."

"I've no desire to stick to him. Job, you're a scream. What's gotten into you to-night?"

"Nothing at all. I was just merely saying that Ambrose had the right idea. He's in it for what he gets out of it. And he gets it out. Now take me, on the other hand——"

"Listen, Job." She laid a warm hand on his arm. "Don't get to chasing your tail around in a circle. Snap out of it. You know, well as I know, that there are ideals in the world. If there weren't, it would be no place to live in. You're talking to hear yourself talk."

"I don't know if I am. How about you? All that stuff about divorce. Not so much ideals in something I heard some one say awhile back."

"Perhaps I was relieving pressure too."

"I don't know. Well, Ambrose is a good scout. He's got the right idea. Any girl would be justified in talking up to him."

"Job, you make me laugh."

"Come on. Let's go somewhere. I've got an itching heel."

"I can't, Job. Sit still and calm yourself."

He laughed. He leaned back against the cushion of the divan and looked at her. "Well, Ambrose is a good sort. Lots better than some I know."

She made no reply but seemed to be turning over something in her mind. Suddenly he realized how good it was to talk to her, and then he remembered that she had not treated him just right. He would tell her about that sometime. Not now, but sometime. He was very comfortable. Perhaps he had been wrong about that other night: it had not been her fault. After all, it wasn't much that she had done. Just her careless, friendly manner of being nice to every one. He came to a sudden resolve.

"Phil," he began, frowning and just barely touching her arm. "There's something I want to say to you." He might as well speak out his mind about it—a girl had to have some one to tell her whom not to go with. She couldn't know herself—always. But it was a pretty hard thing to do. He paused again, irresolute. Her eyes looked into his, brightly and with a curious veiled expression. "It's not the easiest thing to say——"

Just then the doorbell rang.

Phyllida sprang to her feet. "Just a minute, Job. Jasper has gone, I know." And she reached over

and touched him lightly on the arm and then ran from the room.

Brawn awaited her return eagerly. He heard the door open and then he heard a vigorous voice and then a loud laugh. It jarred on him. He wondered who it could be.

And then Phyllida returned and behind her, rubbing his hands together, came Jerry Cloud. He was wearing a close-fitting Norfolk jacket and a soft shirt with a soft collar attached, and he looked, as he always looked, entirely fresh and smooth and clean. A hard little lump came in Brawn's throat as he rose to his feet.

"Hello, Brawn," Jerry called out indifferently.

Phyllida seated herself in the chair by the table and Cloud drew up another chair, quite close to hers and leaned over facing her, his elbows on his knees. Brawn resumed his seat on the divan.

"Got a car outside," began Cloud to Phyllida. "Uncle John loosened up this evening and let me have it. C'mon. Let's take a ride. Might never have another chance." He had a whimsical, confiding way, and accompanied his bald suggestion with frequent jerks of the head in the direction of the street. Jerry Cloud was thought by many to be a wit; to others, less smartly fashionable, he was merely rude. He rarely shrank from anything in the cause of discretion.

Phyllida laughed and then she frowned and pushed him aside, out of the line of vision toward Brawn. "Behave yourself, Jerry."

Jerry gave ground just a little and then he jerked his head over in Brawn's direction. "Bring your steady along. I'm broad-minded. Maybe we can push



him out somewhere in a dark road." He turned and grinned at Brawn and Brawn simpered.

Brawn was furious. "Don't mind me," he said. "Far be it from me to slow down your speed. Maybe you'll get ambitious and amount to something."

"Ouch!" said Jerry and Phyllida looked at Brawn queerly.

"Hush up, you two," she said. "Don't be so fresh with each other. Jerry, push your chair back and be quiet."

"I don't wanna be quiet. I wanna be wild," he complained.

And then it came to Brawn like a flash that Cloud would not be calling unless he had been told he might. Even he would not have the nerve. And if he were, then that would imply an understanding that he was a privileged person. It was a clear case. He had been right some days ago and had weakly yielded against his cooler judgment. He would *not* be a doormat.

He slowly arose to his feet. He smiled gravely at Phyllida and there was a hurt look in his eyes. "I really must be going," he began, lamely. "I've a case up for to-morrow and I haven't half prepared it," he said. He could feel Cloud's cool, insolent inspection but he did not venture a look at him.

Phyllida did not reply at once and when she did her voice sounded rather high and fine and a bit uncertain. "Your work certainly ties you down, Job."

He went quietly out into the hall and picked up his hat and his coat and his gloves from the table, throwing the coat over his arm. And then he turned to the front door. Phyllida's form was outlined in the sitting-room doorway and she was looking at him.

As he opened the front door, she held out her hand to him and looked him squarely in the eyes. "You needn't have done this," she said.

Something choked in his throat and there was a hot stinging in his eyes. The warmth of her seemed to irradiate out toward him, alluring, almost overpowering, and yet a sharp little spiteful resentment pushed it back in his consciousness. "I'm sorry," he replied shortly.

He walked out the door and down the steps and from the yellow square of light on the pavement, knew that she was watching, and he went blindly on to the sidewalk and paused before deciding which way he would go. And then the door closed coldly, shutting off the light.

## CHAPTER V

**T**HE fall and winter of nineteen sixteen have been described as a quickening prelude. A fever was mounting in the hearts and minds of people. There was a ruthless sweeping forward to something, but to John Brawn it was an ugly period of stagnant calm. Society had unwittingly girded up its loins for one last desperate fling before its impending and unsuspected moratorium. The season opened with a bang in November with a series of three elaborate balls. Brawn had firmly decided that he was "through with all that sort of thing." The first dance came on Friday night, November the twentieth. Brawn was obdurate. He had no fresh white gloves. His ties and collars had acquired a slight discolour. He slipped into his dressing gown at about seven thirty, lighted a cigar and got out one of Mary Johnston's novels to read. He sat with his feet propped on the marble-topped washstand, leaning far back in his rocker, and let the fragrant smoke curl upward into the inverted shade of the light.

As he settled back into his chair he felt a complacent sort of satisfaction that he was doing the sensible thing. He had been intending to break off for the past three years. Now that he had done it he felt immeasurably older, more settled, more worth while. For a fleeting moment he envisioned the glitter, the chaff,

the swing of the party that would soon be starting. Just like an eddy of gay autumn leaves it would be, stirred by a rising breeze—feathery, powdery, empty. Such parties had been to him a sort of stimulus; they lit up his nervous system so that its flares consumed the husks of his daily depression. He could not explain it in his coldly rational moments. Some of the men who frequented these affairs needed the backing of three or four drinks before they could have a good time. Brawn could not understand that. The jingle he got from a party was not the sodden sort of thing one gets from drink—he always thought of drinking as “sodden”—and he could not understand why some wished to mix their indulgences. It seemed wasteful and the height of ill-taste. Brawn had not been swept into the widening whirlpool then in vogue. He even admitted the existence of social obligations. And then he turned over the first page of the novel and tried to remember what it had told him by way of introduction.

Directly he got into the swing of the story and settled comfortably into his chair. The light blazed unwinkingly down, the blue smoke curled lazily up and the room lay dozing in the haze. He read on, getting vaguely the import of the opening chapter. Once or twice he felt that romance was calling him, but something was ticking away somewhere in the back of his head like a clock on a sleepless night and it kept calling him back from self-forgetfulness. The ashes of his cigar became of a sudden incredibly long. He got up, stepped over to the wash bowl and flicked them into it. And then he realized how alone he was. He saw how the room lay in varying shades of emptiness; the glar-



ing patch beneath the light, the quieter gray over as far as the edge of the bed, and lustreless shadow beyond. It was a desolate place for a cultured man to live in. He had never lived in the room before, merely slept there and dressed for the evening. Why hadn't he noticed it? It was the very symbol of his failure. He walked back to the chair and stared at the book, lying face downward upon the seat. He frowned at it. He looked about the room. The curtains were down from the windows; Mrs. Melton was having them washed. There was no cloth on the wash-stand top. Ashes were strewn on the edge of the little table by the door. The bed was rumped. In a corner lay his underwear where he had thrown it just before he had bathed. It was unlovely.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and stared at the chair. What was he going to do? He was getting nowhere, absolutely nowhere. Each month it was a desperate struggle, paying as many bills as possible and staving off the other creditors for another month. He was like the donkey with the cabbage head hung from a stick between his ears. The cabbage head was financial security. And he was just beginning to see that it never did any good just to run after it. One had to sneak up on it in a roundabout fashion. His law practice was not so bad; there was many an older lawyer who would have been glad to have it. But it was certain he was not getting any of the benefit of his fees. Look at the room!

He walked over and picked up his underwear, held it gingerly for a moment, and then chucked it behind the door. He then smoothed from the bed covers the imprint of his body. They were futile impulses and the

satisfaction spent itself with the doing. The tall uncurtained windows were as gaunt and unashamed as naked old hags, with their folding wooden shutters and their bare curtain rods like scrawny bones. He was sorry he had not let Phyllida make him those flimsy curtains when she had offered. Phyllida had a clever way of adjusting things, fixing things up. She would be an inspiration to some man; there would be no dull moments for him. Well, *he* was free. There were no strings of obligations clinging to him. It made no difference when he went out or when he came in, or how he spent his time or whom he went with. There was nothing to prevent his single-tracking on the law. He tossed Mary Johnston's conscientious effort over on the bed and sat down in the chair. He leaned his head back against the head rest and gave himself up to his freedom. It would be Law and nothing else. Two hours a night for a year would make him a qualified expert on something. The average lawyer never did any studying, merely relied on what his daily experience and his routine cases brought him. Abstract study was an Arcadia. Unfortunately there were no books in the house that he could start on. He decided that he would bring some home on the morrow. And then, with this question settled—he had the feeling that he had come a long way down the road of decision—he wondered what he was going to do with the balance of the evening.

He stood up. He looked at his cigar and realized that it was about smoked out. He remembered that he had no more in his coat pocket. And then pleasantly he realized that he might go to the drugstore for a fresh supply. The walk would do him good, clear out

the fog from his brain. He put on his collar and tie, briskly, satisfied that he had something definite to do. He smoothed his hair before the glass, slipped on his coat, and went softly down the stairs. He did not want to disturb Mrs. Melton. The good soul had seemed so surprised when he had told her he was staying in. He did not want to explain that he was merely going to the drugstore. So he closed the front door quietly behind him and hurried down the walk to the street.

The night air felt so good, filling his lungs, that he decided that he would not just go to the corner drugstore. They did not have as good a stock of tobacco anyway. Fourth Street was only a block or two farther. He would go around the block and stop half way on his detour for the desired cigars. He stepped off quite briskly and went swinging along. Through the thinning branches the stars twinkled, crisp and bright. Lights glowed like rosy beacons in the windows as he passed and he occasionally caught sight of some contented stay-at-home, with spectacles and a book and an apparent immunity to the endemic social fever. Brawn caught the point of view and was entirely sympathetic. His errand was a domestic sort of errand—getting cigars from the drugstore. There were no haste and hurry and scramble in that; he enjoyed the relaxation of the idea. He had been burning his candle at both ends and it was sensible to snuff one of the flames out entirely.

There was the usual congress of drugstore pilgrims clustered about the door as Brawn entered. He edged his way through, conscious of the gleam of a white shirt front and the clinging, disturbing odour of hair



tonic. It was the younger crowd in preliminary assembly before its social onslaught and the looks that it gave Brawn were tolerantly superior and indifferent. He immediately knew that he had put on a soiled collar and that he had not shaved. And his manner with the clerk as he selected his cigars was a bit subdued and reflective and he failed to sound out the boy's mentality, as was his usual custom. He was ordinarily a great student of character.

He clipped off the end of one of the cigars, lighted it, and then made his way circuitously to the door. These youngsters vaguely disturbed him. They were not noisy, nor presumptuous, but it was most evident that they felt their superiority, were entirely sure of themselves. They had draped themselves about the drugstore so that it was impossible to avoid them. There were two by the door, one by the cigar stand, two sat on stools before the soda fountain, and two more were leaning on the notion case with great disregard for the tensile strength of the glass. Though they had not patronized Mr. Benedict, the druggist, otherwise than by using his alcohol torch to light their cigarettes, yet one shrank from disturbing them, from intruding on their charmed circle just to purchase a few drab sundries. Brawn hesitated, then broke through and gained the street.

He wondered at the softness of the air. Vaguely restless, he shrank from the thought of returning home, leaving this suggestive outdoors. Unconsciously he had absorbed some of the life philosophy of the drugstore crowd, in that very brief peripatetic contact. He was not just ready for slippers and a fire. He had never plunged into the realities of life; for this reason



he was so irresistibly drawn by its flame. A moth never leaves a lamp with a glass chimney. Along the street in the next block stretched a black line of motors. Every now and then would come another, feeling its way, searching for a scanty anchorage by the curb, its lights groping, mechanical fashion. There was a faint stirring in the air, a mingling of doors slamming, a scraping, a hum of voices and a laugh, and the sudden welling of string music somewhere through an opening door, then swallowed up in the general murmur. The smoke from the cigar was very fragrant, and then there came a street car, rushing past with its whirring roar, its windows open as for mid-summer, and the bare branches on the tree just above Brawn's head gave themselves up to a rattling protest. Brawn turned face about and started to walk north on Fourth Street. The stars smiled faintly very high in the heavens and between them and Fourth Street drifted an almost invisible vapour screen, suggesting that somewhere between a nomad wind was passing.

In some way Brawn felt that his depression had quite lifted. A calm had settled over his spirit. He had health and work and training. If he had no more, if romance and love and glamour were not to be his portion—well, he was no worse off than millions of others. He was no weakling to cry because, in the order of things, he was not to be given all the standard equipment a standard person was supposed to have in making the trip through life. He crossed the street and, passing the first of the series of motors, gazed into its forbidding depths. It seemed to him a faithful, waiting, serving thing. Some day perhaps he would show Phil what a really good friend he was.

He passed another motor and another—all waiting. They seemed detached symbols of another life. And as he walked along their silent ranks his senses quickened and his curiosity roused itself. He slipped through and crossed the street the better to see, as he passed, what sort of party they were “throwing.” A door slammed and a couple crossed the pavement in front of him, the girl with her cloak plucked up about her, stepping gingerly. The broad low vestibule aflood with light yawned like a cheery cavern and there was a sucking noise of the big front door as it swung open and shut and then open and shut again. Through the filmy curtains he could see a shuttle-passing of brilliant forms, swaying, pausing, and then sweeping on. Brawn would have liked to stand there watching, but of course that was out of the question. So he merely slowed his steps. The arriving couple mounted to the vestibule and moved across it before him, the man reaching out his hand for the door, which simultaneously swung out to meet him, impelled from within. And in the dazzling light Brawn recognized the soft gleam of a blue velvet cloak with a deep collar of white fox, and, below, a pair of very slender ankles and black, satiny pumps. Even as he doubted, the girl turned her head and laughingly called out something over her shoulder to her companion. And he saw that it was, without question, Phyllida. The door closed and then the man came back down the steps, probably after something left in the car. Brawn slipped into the shadow as the man passed before him across the pavement and he saw that it was George Ambrose. The latter walked past him up the pavement, calling out a name, and when he had passed, Brawn stepped across

the bright, revealing stretch of pavement before the entrance and hurried on.

On he walked, passing block after block apparently oblivious of their passing. He came to Broadway and crossed that Rubicon into a frank night life. The blazing windows, the pressing crowds, claimed him no more than had the dark stretches of uninhabited shade. But when he came to Walnut Street he seemed to come to some decision. He turned aside and gazed into a jeweller's window at a velvet tray studded with brilliant sparkles. He gazed intently at the tray and smiled softly. His coherent thought was: "They'll hold on like grim death, every time. You can't jar them loose." And then he started counting up and was surprised to find that even after careful recollection it had only been three years since Phyllida's *début* party.

And feeling cynically wise and a bit weary of body, he crossed the street and went into the club.

He walked into the reading room which was bright but deserted. He sat down in a deep leather chair by a long table and picked up a magazine which he opened and made some show of reading. It proved to be quite dull so he discarded it and picked up another. This second one was no better than the first and he let his legs slip out before him and his head loll back against the cushion. He wondered if Phyllida was going to marry George Ambrose. There was something amusing in the thought, a tinge of tolerant bitterness. Ambrose was a man to be married. And then he read a little.

Voices sounded in the hall. He looked above his magazine and saw two men come strolling toward him from the reading room. They were Larry Burton



and Stew Wells, part of the froth about the city's social brim—soonest tasted and soonest forgotten. Brawn resumed his reading.

The men came over to a divan just across the room from Brawn's chair and sat down. Burton was deep in some story he was telling and every now and then he would be interrupted by a laugh from Wells. His voice was low but the room was unusually still and while Brawn tried to focus his attention on his book, he could not help hearing the most of what Burton was telling. Without having to search back for the threads of the story Brawn could tell the tone of it, knew it for some personal reminiscence with colourful possibilities. Burton bored him to extinction. He yawned and rattled a page as he turned it over. The voice sank a bit lower, but he could still hear what the man was saying. And in spite of himself he caught himself listening.

There came a pause. Burton leaned back against the cushion and fatuously blew smoke rings at the ceiling. Brawn caught a quick glimpse of them over his magazine. He yawned again.

"Yeah," said Burton, laughing softly. "I thought so too.—But you never can tell.—Listen"—his voice dropped still lower—"you can count on old Jerry's makin' mighty few mistakes. Where there's smoke, there's fire——"

Then came an unintelligible comment from Wells.

"Hell, no. He doesn't want to marry her. Hasn't any money. They don't pin that birdie down.—Family's as common as dirt, too.—But, boy!—She could put her shoes——" he turned away his head and the rest was lost in a jumble.



Brawn was angry when he first began to listen. He needed a vent, a stop-gap for his feelings anyway, and Burton and Wells had always irritated him. Here was a salacious bit of gossip starting. It was nothing to him, nothing in his young life, but a remnant of real chivalry clung to his make up. And then he caught the "Family's as common as dirt too," and then the rest of it. There came a cold spot in the pit of his stomach. He threw the magazine over on the table and rose to his feet. As he did so the eyes of the two turned to him.

He stood there, pulling down his coat in the back, away from his collar, and spoke in a thin, low voice:

"Don't sling your mud around so free and easy, Burton. There's some decent people might object to it, you know—though I haven't an idea to whom you refer, even if I did overhear what you said about them."

Burton's face flamed. "What the hell is it to you?" He made as if to rise, but Brawn had turned on his heel and was walking slowly out the door. So Burton sat back again. "Damn lily-dip," he laughed shortly to Wells. "As I was saying——" And then he looked toward the door whence Brawn had disappeared. "Ha ha!—I wonder——" and then he poked Wells in the ribs and was overcome with mirth.

Brawn strolled down the hall, his whole being in a tingle. Every square inch of his body was blushing. Later, when he had to pass the library door again, he might come face to face with Burton. Just what would he do then? Of course Burton had no "guts" but that made no difference. That wasn't the trouble. Although he had a natural, deep-seated aversion to

brawls and bickerings, it was not the possibility of such that now seemed so distasteful to him.

He paused at the doorway leading into the bar and looked in. Two men stood at the far end, in the corner, hunched over their glasses, talking in low tones. No, there wasn't any use in his getting anything to drink. At the same time he craved one. He stood watching the white-aproned bar keeper shake up something in a glass. He had told Burton he had no idea of whom Burton was talking. But he had. He knew perfectly well. And part of it was perfectly true. The rest of it was outrageous. But the minute men began talking, well—— It was as if a lot of strange people had come upon him dressing. He wanted to fight; he wanted to run away and hide; he didn't know what he wanted to do. He was trembling all over. He went to the cloak room and got his hat and then he hurried from the club, out into the night.

## CHAPTER VI

BURTON apologized a few days later. There was a deep frown between his eyes and he seemed genuinely troubled. Brawn was embarrassed for a moment and then inclined to warm a bit. But the new aloofness that had of late been ruling him seized him again and he dropped Burton's hand and laughed shortly: "No coal out of my cellar, Burton."

Burton thereupon looked surprised, seemed on the point of speaking further, and then took his leave. It was in the wash-room of the club and there was not the utmost privacy. And so the affair was thus apparently forgotten. . . .

On November the twenty-third there was another ball. Without much self-analysis, with absolutely nothing of premeditation, Brawn went. At the last minute something urged him that was very like the old pressure. He felt that he had to do something.

The party was in full blast when he arrived, and he lingered on the periphery of the whirlpool, and gazed fatuously into its depths. His consciousness felt blurred to it, but there was a high-keyed jangle to his nerves. Pretty young girls, pink-tipped with sophistication, smiled vacantly at him, seeing no one. They made absolutely no response to his pleasantries; merely gazed dreamily past him as he spoke. His vernacular was obsolete. There is nothing like society life in the

rigour of its demands. There is nothing perennial in it unless it be its constant change. What is fresh for it to-day is unspeakably stale to-morrow. Somehow, in the interval of one season, the entire outlook had altered. Curiosity and excitement were written on the young faces rather than frank, joyous pleasure and Brawn felt singularly like a discredited antique. His own friends were at home—in bed, where he ought to be.

He would have denied any expectation of it, but Phyllida did not show up. Nor did Ambrose. So at eleven thirty, Brawn gave up the unequal struggle and left the field to youth. Reaching home he decided that the world had gone on without him. . . .

Christmas came and went, a phantom convention. Then he fell in with an odd coterie. Three women, philosophically resigned to the futility of the flesh pots and with a voluntary urge toward the smartly cultural, welcomed him to their midst. They were not ancient women, nor women whom the fiery spirit of revolt had warped past all semblance to their sex. But they rose to subtler bait—or so they assured themselves and implied to Brawn. Under a pseudonym one of them had sold a pungently feeling and convincing “spinster” essay to the *Atlantic Monthly* and had never got over having qualms lest she be discovered.

Two of them lived in a small down-town apartment; the third was a drifter from the boarding house district. To the former place Brawn frequently gravitated. They lulled his suspicious unease; they drew him out with timely tid-bits of general and local gossip; they kept him going down conversational lanes that were wide and comfortable and required no technical



dredging or levelling. And they missed no chance of showing him how grateful they were for his attention. And with three in the crowd it was like shooting at a covey of partridges: one rarely hits unless he picks out his bird.

One woman was an under librarian; another sold lumber—took phone orders—for a pleasant but inebriate darling of society; and the third bought corsets for one of the big department stores. It was surprising, the variety of information these women picked up. They kept Brawn on his toes.

January passed rather quietly. After the final flurry of bills, Brawn experienced a most agreeable shock in the conviction that he had gained some ground, pecuniarily. And he was being appreciated. He began to take more interest in his work. He began to read at night, not every night, but frequently enough to set himself a sort of schedule which he occasionally upset. It made him feel quite righteous. People began to come to his office: grocers with small collections and small contractors with their misunderstandings. He had a real-estate transaction or two. He shared a waiting room with three other lawyers; his private office was his own. It was getting to be a common thing for him to find some woman with a shawl, some man with frayed cuffs and twirling his hat between thumb and forefinger and looking disconsolate and uncomfortable upon the stiffest of chairs—all waiting for his return. He found that he was going out less at night. He even misplaced his engagement book and did not bother to get another. And there was a little money to his credit in the bank.

One day, early in March, he had a visit from his

friend Temcy Goins. Temcy had come from Shelby County several years before. Temcy was a coloured preacher. In other times and in other surroundings, he would have been a soldier of fortune or a missionary or a crook. He craved self-expression. So he rented the first floor of a ramshackle building, put in a few benches, and proceeded to exhort a flock. He preached a gospel. The gospel was an ornate mixture of Moses, St. Paul, and Temcy Goins.

"How goes it with you, Temcy?"

Temcy hung his head. His humid eyes were melancholy. "Po'ly, Mist' John."

"How's that?—Business is picking up. Things been fine with me."

Temcy raised his eyes and squinted cannily. "Is you ever notice 'at w'en times is good fo' de lawyeh, dat hit slim pickin's fo' Jesus?"

"I hope you're mistaken, Temcy. But what can I do for you?"

"Well, Mist' John. Hit a ticklish bisnis." He frowned and hitched his chair nearer and began to tap with his forefinger upon the desk. "I ain' aim to do nothin' final. I ain' sho' what I really does want to do, Mist' John. Ef a man set aside his wife, kin' he pick her up agin' soon's he fin's she done profit by de experience?"

Brawn composed his face. "What's the trouble between you and Amanthus, now, Temcy?"

"Dey ain' no trubbel. You see, 'Manthus got fool notions. She think dat no preacher's wife got enny bisnis takin' in wash. An' she say so. And *I* say she ain' got no bisnis doin' anything else. Mist' John, we ain' took in enuf lately to pay de rent. An' ef I fin's

time fo' a bit ob calciminin' endurin' de week, it seem to me soapsuds ain' gonna pisen 'Manthus' blood."

"Why don't you tell her so, Temcy?"

The darky looked up quickly. "Why don' a fish fly?" They were silent a minute, Temcy regarding his boots with lugubrious solemnity.

"Then what is your idea?" Brawn broke the silence at length.

"Lawse, Mist' John, I ain' got no idea. 'At's why I come to you. You see, Mist' John, all I aim fo' to do is lay huh aside fo' a while ontill she gits de notion dis heah chu'ch ain' make no lady of huh. An' den I picks huh up agin' an goes erlong natural."

"Are you your own treasurer, Temcy?"

"I is. Lately hit ain' been a ha'd job, countin' de money. Wid niggehs gittin six an' sebben dollars a day hit make 'em careful. None ob it goes to de Lawd."

"Nor to the Church of the Exodus?"

"Fo' long de chu'ch ob de Exodus gwine in de hands ob a receivuh. Dat's all. Now ef 'Manthus——"

"Suppose you send Amanthus down to see me. Maybe I can straighten her out.—That's a good idea of yours but I am afraid it won't work shipshape. And by the way, Mrs. Haldeman Davis wants her brick stable calcimined. She's making a garage out of it. Out on Sixth Street, you remember?"

The door of the private office swung open. A man poked in his head.

"Just a minute, Mr. Cunningham.—You go out to see Mrs. Haldeman Davis. And you send Amanthus in to see me. Got that address?"

He edged the bowing darky out of the room.



Mr. Cunningham came in. He was a young, nervous man with eyes that were never still and hands that were always moving.

"Just want to tell you," he said, "that that business looks as if it was going over." His eyes rested for a moment on Brawn's face—keen and expectant.

Brawn turned to his desk. "I don't know, Charlie. Things have been pretty good for me here lately."

"I see they have." He jerked his head in the direction of the door. "That kind of clients."

"Well——"

"Time you were giving up this tin-horn notion about law. Of course I know a salary job's no job to keep. But then—say, listen. Old man Hodges is going to Florida to fish for the balance of the winter. And Mr. Smith has been elected vice president of the golf club. And there's me—and the office force."

"But——"

"Oh, I know. They won't amount to anything. Ever. Lot of night-school lawyers.—And it's not up to me to convince you against your will. But old man Smith was talking about you to me yesterday afternoon. And it could be worked all right. They're not going to live forever. We could swing that firm in a year or two and—— Well, so long. I'm late now. I'll let you know in case anything comes up." Abruptly he started across the room and out through the door.

"I say, Charlie——" Brawn started from his chair but Cunningham had vanished.

Brawn resumed his seat. Tin-horn practice! Maybe it was. He didn't know what was best to do. Hodges and Smith were a good firm. But he didn't



know. He'd be under some one else's supervision. This corporation practice included a lot of grovelling details. And Charlie Cunningham—he was a good scout. He had known him twenty years or more but Charlie was erratic sometimes and he might be mistaken. It might be best to leave things well enough alone.

And then all of a sudden a feeling of loneliness oppressed him. Not a kinsman in the whole town; not a soul to turn to in case of illness or trouble. There were some cousins in Lexington and an aunt in Clarksville, Tennessee. A room in a boarding house, a membership at the club, a lot of friends who would shoot pool or play a game of bridge and then go home to their wives. A flock of chattering girls, marrying off one by one and shifting their viewpoints at once from dances and teas to white woodwork and babies and gossip. Such had been life as he'd seen it. Those friends—and Phyllida. There was a lot of crystalizing in the process of growing old. One gathered substance like a dust particle in a solution: friends, properties, duties, children. He was feeling quite lonely. Phyllida was one of the few that had not yet passed that boundary of youth. And in all probability she would soon marry George Ambrose for all that he was a Catholic. He had that capacity of acquiring, without which a man cannot marry, cannot settle down. As for Cloud—a sinister foreboding came over him. Suppose she should get mixed up with Cloud? It was unbelievable; she was not the sort to get entangled. She kept her head too well. At least she always had. What she could see in Cloud, and for that matter what Cloud could see in her, was to him a mystery.

It made him sore about the heart thinking about it. It was none of his business. But it would be within the bounds of possibility for Phyllida to go farther and farther,—thinking she was having a good time, in Jerry's uncle's car—the car Jerry was always pretending the old man had loaned him just for the evening—and then, all of a sudden, almost anything could happen. Every time he saw Cloud he felt the same as when he saw buzzards over a field. . . .

But it was none of his business. He was nobody. He had no immediate background of belongings and properties. All his background was in the dingy past. He lived in a boarding house and had niggers and working people for clients. And Phil never took him seriously. Who could? But it didn't matter. The Colemans were pretty hard to swallow. If anybody had any notion of marrying, in-laws like that were always a deterrent. Now if this new prospect opened up all right—— He suddenly realized the trend his thought was taking and sprang to his feet with an exclamation of impatience. He seized his hat and hurried out upon the street.

But the day was not finished. In the afternoon's mail he received a letter from his insurance firm—the firm for which he had been investigating occasional accidents. The letter made him a proposition definitely to represent the company on all matters in the territory. It furthermore offered him a monthly retainer fee of seventy-five dollars. The news did not exhilarate him but it did fill him with a sort of solid satisfaction. Shyster practice? Maybe. Maybe not. He was glad he had not been too eager with Cunningham. "That's coming along," was the gist of his

thought. He sat for a moment, chin on palm, and watched the people threading along Jefferson Street, the good folk of Louisville about their business. He was a part of those people. He was needing them and they were needing him.

He grabbed up his hat and went out to get himself a drink at a soda fountain. There was something solid in the way he did it. . . .

The three spinster ladies were pleased—they told him so—about his good fortune, but they were not unusually impressed. He took them his good news that night, en route to a theatre party. He frequently dropped in after the manner of an epicure indulging in a cocktail before a pleasantly anticipated dinner. After a moment's impressive silence, Miss Jenkins—who was the corsetière—turned to the assistant librarian, Miss Blunk. "I very nearly fell for the neatest little ivory cigarette holder this morning."

Miss Blunk looked reprovingly up from the Sunday Supplement. "What can you be wanting with a cigarette holder? You don't smoke at all."

"I might," responded Miss Jenkins, nervously adjusting her figure. "That's just the point. I was almost tempted. You wouldn't mind, would you, John, if I smoked?"

"He would. Just because he comes to see us every now and then is no sign he hasn't good Puritan blood in his veins."

"Aw, say!" interposed Brawn.

"Do you know the first time I ever saw John Brawn?" went on Miss Blunk relentlessly. "Well, it was on top of a sea-going hack, in a November fog, six years ago."



"Is that your idea of being a Puritan!" cried Miss Jenkins from the divan.

"Just give me time. I didn't say what was inside. The cab stopped and old ladies began to come out. I never saw so many old ladies in my life. Five or six of them—all in one cab. And this young cavalier jumped down off the roof of the cab and took the whole bunch of them——"

"Cavalier! I thought you said Puritan. Say, you're getting your dates mixed, aren't you?"

Brawn was flushing. "I——"

"Let me finish. He took 'em all in the Rathskeller entrance and I closed my eyes."

"It was a meeting of the Literary Club," explained Brawn.

"I know. Let me finish.—The *crème de la crème*. He was in sole charge. Mrs. Rathburn, Mrs. Woodberry—all the grand dames. Now for you to——"

"If he has a real weakness for old ladies, why doesn't he come here to live with us? What do you say to that, John? Don't you think——" interposed Miss Jenkins with sprightly enthusiasm.

"Cornelia! Your imagination will get you into trouble yet.—He didn't want to do it. It was just his high sense of responsibility."

"You're not coming here just for that reason, are you, John? Oh, how I'd hate being a responsibility."

"You're not," said Brawn. "But I have one at the theatre. Gotta go." Somehow he was feeling that their chatter was a bit dull. Same old stuff all the time.

The two women glanced up but remained seated. "Bye-bye, John. Don't forget us in prosperity."



They let him go through the door and out into the darkened passage unescorted. It was the price of intimacy but somehow he felt as if he deserved more. He did not know that sympathy with success is a very rare gem indeed.

## CHAPTER VII

**M**ARCH finished its work one Saturday afternoon. All the morning Brawn had been too busy to realize it. Mrs. Crane, the wife of the president of Stilz & Crane, makers of porcelain bathtubs, was taking him to a tea that afternoon, up on the River Road. The tea was at the Marlowes' and it was a tactical manœuvre in the interest of Hildegard Stilz, just out, and of Mr. Marlowe's sand pit and gravel bed.

At two o'clock Brawn closed his desk and sighed. He paused for a moment in his swivel chair and looked aimlessly up at the framed diploma above his desk. Then he seized his hat and hurried out.

Mrs. Wilbur Crane was a new arrival from Illinois. She was getting acclimated. Her acquaintance with Brawn dated from the dismal ball of November the twenty-third. She was pleasantly cordial when Brawn accepted her phone invitation to be a passenger in her car out to the tea for Miss Stilz and she hinted at other passengers. But when the limousine rolled up to the curb on Compton Street, she occupied the inclosed portion of the car alone. And Brawn kept her waiting ten minutes.

Her smile lacked warmth when he came out shedding apologies, and for a short time the conversation showed jagged edges. For Brawn was wondering who

else might be sharing this interior with them, and Mrs. Crane was, with marked restraint, administering first aid to her ruffled feelings. But they were passing through a lovely, shaded district of the town, where the trees lined the curbstones like tall posts in a feathery trellis and the sunlight was so faintly golden, the grass and the new leaves so delicately fresh, and the air so redolent of crystal rain on dusty earth that the two of them were irresistibly drawn together in the common cause of humanity: to enjoy.

"Were you any relation of Judge Brawn, Mr. Brawn?" Mrs. Crane graciously broke the silence. She was smiling now.

"My father," said Brawn. "Came here from Virginia."

"Ye-es?" Mrs. Crane seemed pleased. She had been making inquiries and was merely orienting herself, a difficult process for some people even in the democratic South. "And why haven't you been coming to the parties? A young man like yourself—it's selfish of you, I'm sure. Such a lovely crowd of girls."

"I'm afraid I've been too busy, Mrs. Crane. You see, I have to make my living and——"

"Ye-es. Of course. But then you must have some pleasure. What do you do, Mr. Brawn?"

"I'm a lawyer."

"Ye-es. Of course. Mrs. Benedict told me. But you're not old enough to settle down exclusively to work. A man in your business, it seems to me, ought to get out and meet and know a lot of people."

"I guess I've done my share of that. Three or four years ago I was doing enough to last me for a lifetime. —Do you know the Bluegrass, Mrs. Crane?"

"Yes. Oh yes. Lovely, lovely place." A smart little motor cab went whirling by and Mrs. Crane leaned forward in a desperate but futile effort to see who was in it.

"Well, three years ago, a crowd of us used to motor up every week-end to dances in Frankfort and Lexington—at the country club. Kept me broke all the time. We'd start out at noon Saturday to go for a ride around the park and not come back maybe until Monday morning. Why, on one trip we had twenty-three punctures and blowouts and we stuffed an old shirt in the tire and came in on the old shirt. We spent one night on the road—the girls in the car with the chaperon and the rest of us scattered over the landscape. I slept under a shed by the road and when I woke up I found there were pigs in it—just a pig sty, that was all. And another time we went up to Jim Bulliss's wedding up in Danville and we left after a dance—three o'clock in the morning. It was Christmas week and while we were on the road it blew up a blizzard and we——" Mrs. Crane was looking out the window; she was not hearing him at all—"we'd like to have not gotten there."

At his pause she turned to him and smiled. "You did have a good time, didn't you?" She seemed to be turning over something in her mind. Then she smiled again, this time with frank archness. "You see, I'm appropriating a young beau to-day but I'm still old enough to give you good advice. Charlie had to be in Chicago and I did ask Bessie Love to come with us, but Bessie had a headache, poor dear, and I'm really not so sorry."

Brawn shuddered. He knew Bessie Love of old.



"I'm sure the ill wind brought its blessings to my door, Mrs. Crane."

He spoke so sincerely that she reached out and patted his hand. "There, there. With a gift like that you have no right to bury yourself away somewhere. You know I have a daughter. Angeline. She is nearly fifteen. She will be coming out some of these days and I want her to meet all the nice men."

"Is that so?" The response trailed rather wearily. It was such an old, old business.

They came at length to Mrs. Marlowe's. Turning sharply to the right, the car threaded its way along a narrow lane lined with willows and water maples that gave forth a high, sibilant whisper like an incipient whistle as they passed. They crossed the track of the interurban and then began to climb a winding roadway that twisted up and across the face of the cliff like a capricious ribbon. At one turn they swung around a shoulder that jutted out above the river and the golden ripples from sun paths on the water far away sent blinding little flashes against the windshield and into their eyes. They came to a wide gate in a shaggy box hedge and turned in, and in another moment Brawn was handing his lady across a worn old horse block.

The tea was, of course, indoors and there were the babble and bustle incident to such gatherings. Brawn was having doubts as to his eternal fitness for promiscuous social contact—after four months of purposeful work—and wandered from group to group, very carefully avoiding any entanglement. Mrs. Crane he had left in the shelter of a congeniality from Peoria, and she had apparently forgotten him.

There were present two elements: the close friends of Miss Hildegard and the supporters of Mr. and Mrs. Marlowe's social position. These two elements were moiling about like oil and water in a glass and were even then beginning to separate into opposite sides of the room with an increasing vacuum between, where Brawn shortly found himself, a vague, indiscriminate atom feeling neither cohesion with the one nor adhesion to the other. An open French door and a stretch of greening lawn caught his eye. He slipped out and away.

The Marlowe gardens were noted in Kentucky. To the east was a grove of ancient trees that held the high land clear to the edge of the river bluff. To the west the ground had been cleared and it dipped away in graded terraces to a white lattice fence with brick posts, a quarter of a mile distant. On the horizontal surfaces of the terraces and covering the wider stretch of level ground to the north lay an army of flower beds freshly spaded and smoothed and waiting. At frequent intervals little walks of dark red brick went rambling around thick clumps of lilac bushes and beneath little arching trellises covered with withered vines. The grass between the flower beds was the vividest green imaginable and in the fence corners the crocuses were poking up their vari-coloured heads. There was a delicious smell of the damp, fresh earth and in soft, pervading gusts came the undefinable smell of the river winding its slow, majestic way to the northwest.

Something let go in Brawn's body. He felt himself melting into the harmony of the evening, and responsibility and convention vanished entirely—futile, man-

made things. He wandered over in the direction of the river bluff, with the slanting sunlight soft and warm upon his face and the breeze ruffling his hair. Far to the northwest stretched the line of the opposite shore. Upon the opaque, yellowish shimmer of the river drifted an elongated dot, and a tentacle sweeping up therefrom in a tiny arc flashed a keen pin-prick of light and disappeared again. It was a fisherman laying his lines for river cat. Very softly, almost as though he were afraid he might be disturbing something or somebody, Brawn slipped through an opening in the fence and out upon the edge of the bluff. Below him fell the ground in a great tangle of rocks and shrubbery to the second rise, for sixty feet or more. There was a narrow strip of fertile farm land reaching along between the foot of the bluff and the river bank and in this a man was ploughing.

A few steps to Brawn's left was a rustic pergola or lookout, with a little rail and two rough seats. It was perched on a large rock at the very brink of the bluff. Brawn walked slowly over to it and sat down.

The sun began to slide riverward, reddening the vapours about the water so that a rosy opalescence seemed to gather, tremulous, out of nowhere, and the smoke pall from the city northward began to glow and shift, with thin streamers of wisp-like smoke curling upward into the pale turquoise of the sky. There came the sharp clatter of a flock of scolding sparrows over in a bush behind him and then, farther off, up the river, the hoarse, moaning call of a river steamer, rising and then mellowing off in the distance. Brawn was touched with a wistful discontent. The prospect of his law practice sank into an unfathomable abyss. He leaned



over and sat with his elbows on the railing, his chin on his hands, and gazed down the slowly passing river. There were other things, things very much worth while, slipping away from him, too, forever past his reach.

For a long time he sat, motionless, and then a step, a very light soft step, sounded in the dried leaves behind him, and with a nervous start he straightened up and turned around. But it was too late; some one was even then coming through the gateway out upon the edge of the bluff. He sat still so as not to give the impression that he was being disturbed. Incuriously he watched the opening, and then Phyllida stepped through and up to the edge and looked down at the slope of rocks and bushes. And then she saw him—they were not more than ten feet apart—and a curious little uncertain expression came crowding into her face.

Suddenly she smiled, flushed ever so little, and came toward him. "Perfect little *deus ex machina*," she laughed. "Sunset, brooding nature—alone at last." Her laugh was a little hard. "What brings you here?"

Brawn was recovering slowly but there was still an uncertainty in the reserves that he was trying to summon. "I'm ambassador in a new court. I came hunting for possible business but somehow I like this better."

Phyllida raised her eyebrows and stared past him down the river.

"And you?" Brawn caught a quick look at her profile. "Won't you sit down?"

"Me?—I'm the necessary touch of culture in the modern barbaric setting." And, as Brawn appeared



not to understand: "I'm supposed to know all there is to literature and poetry and drama. You haven't heard? Well, I'm in charge of a counter at Fielding's Book Store now."

She came and sat down on the rustic bench and leaned her arms on the railing. "It's lovely here."

So she was working! The thought gave him funny little tingling sensations. She could not be doing that and be on the brink of marriage. For some reason he had dogmatically decided that she would marry—some one—probably Ambrose. And for that matter—his spirit trilled a little higher—would she take up anything seriously if all she cared about was a high old time?

"How's—how's George?" he stumbled.

"George?—Oh, all right, I guess. I never see George. He's deserted me entirely."

For quite a while she seemed content just to sit and gaze at the river and Brawn struggled but could find nothing whatever to say. He wanted to ask about Cloud, but somehow he did not dare. There had come into her face, it seemed to him, a softness, an ethereal charm which the iridescent, shimmering light accentuated. The tip of her chin, the smooth line of her throat, the confusion of her hair—she turned to him and made as if to rise. "But I'm intruding on your sanctuary."

"Don't go," said Brawn. "I've—there's no reason why you shouldn't be enjoying it too."

"No? That's nice."

Brawn flushed. "I've been an awful fool," he said.

There was no change in the expression of her face. And then, as if speaking to the far-off, misty river

bank, her lips barely moving: "I sometimes wonder if you have."

He caught his breath. For a moment a new Phylida seemed to sit before him, a new and strange person, strangely like the girl he sometimes dreamed she might be. She seemed to be sorry for something, no longer laughing at life.

"I thought——" he began sombrely.

"That's just the trouble. You oughtn't to think—ever. It's what causes all the trouble in this world." She turned toward him again; all the sharpness, all the cynical aloofness seemed to have gone from her. She was a part with the evening and for a moment he wondered how the world had touched her or—for a fleeting moment—if he were being made light of in some new and subtle fashion. The sun dipped behind the smoke pall and the golden glimmer in the air faded. He sat there by her side and watched the sky. He could have reached out and touched her if he had dared. But it was all so ephemeral he dared not move—dared scarcely breathe. And the light in the sky grew softer and then the river steamer which they had heard hoarsely calling came gliding down the oily yellow water with a hollow breathing of its stacks and the slow rhythmic plash of paddles. And directly even it was gone.

She sprang to her feet. "Oh, I must be going.—How late is it?—This enchanted place makes one forget one has to work—and eat." She was taking one last look at the retreating steamer.

"Might I—" he was feeling an impellent urge, an urge beyond reason—"might I——" and then as casually as possible: "Home to-morrow night?"

She laughed, a clear, friendly sort of laugh. "Surely. Come around."

They walked back across the garden and when they arrived at the door of the house they noticed that the string of motors had practically disappeared. With a whispered protest of dismay, she reached out and gave him a touch on the arm. "Heavens!—What time is it?" And then she fled up the steps and into the house.

Brawn followed her and looked about aimlessly for a few moments. He was told—he was assured without question—that Mrs. Crane had gone. It made him feel a bit queer for a moment. And then he looked about for Phyllida. But she, too, in the interval which he had fecklessly wasted, had slipped away.

## CHAPTER VIII

**J**ANVRIN STREET had been losing ground. The socially elect and those aspiring were turning their faces toward the east. And Janvrin Street was less self-conscious, less spic and span, much less resplendent than—for instance, Westover Court. And on this particular evening it was darker, quite, than any other street in town, with a gentle breeze rustling in the tall elms that lined the sidewalk and shaking down little showers of water on Brawn's head as he walked slowly along. The sun had gone down an hour and a half before, all softly yellow, and the gleam of it had set countless raindrops quivering and sparkling all across the lawns. There had been a liquid gurgling of thrushes in the lilac bushes and the most refreshing odour of a thousand flowering things all crammed into a single breath of a breeze that came dawdling into the city from the southwest, and then suddenly the light had faded and there had come a darkness that was close and warm and intimate, with cloud banks that drifted eastward and occasional breathless showers of rain and every now and then a patch of blue-black sky from which every cloying tarnish had been washed, and pricked here and there with stars.

The uneven surface of the brick pavement felt friendly and familiar to Brawn, even the slanting tree



shadows from the electric light on the corner. But when he turned in at the walk that led up to the Coleman house an awkward sensation seemed uppermost, a feeling of embarrassment just as though cynically prying eyes might be watching him. In case Mrs. Coleman should answer his ring, what should he say to her? Six months was an awkward interval.

As he stood waiting in the vestibule, he felt that he had lost all hold on himself. The April night was so uncertain, shadowed by strange forecasts, and yet warm and fragrant and suggestive. What should he say to her—how would she take things?

The door opened; it was a tremendous door, reaching up nearly to the very high ceiling—it had a flimsy white curtain stretched across it that looked like a gray patch in the shadow. Phyllida's voice was bidding him enter—he could only make out the blur of her in the darkness. There was nothing definite in the voice, nothing definitely hostile, nothing definitely friendly. He followed her into the hall.

"I'm all by myself," she said. "All except Mary who has been naughty and is repenting of her sins upstairs.—I hated to turn on the light. Let's sit back here. Do you mind?"

"Rather," said Brawn.

She led him down the hall to a back window—the square of it was a deep bluish gray and the objects in the hall were just suggested shadows without form. He felt his way along and directly he touched the unmistakable surface of a horse-hair sofa and knew where he was. He sat down. The shadow that was Phyllida disappeared in the blackness of the corner. He could hear her stirring slightly.

"Well?" she said at length.

"I a——" and then he paused and laughed uneasily.

"It's been lovely to-day," she went on as if she had not heard him. "First real spring we've had. I've been sitting here since sunset—here in the soft dark. Smell the lilacs?"

"Yes," he replied. "They're fine, aren't they."

A moment's pause. "April's a mad month. Think if I ever run away it will be in April."

"Not this April, by any chance?" He laughed again. He could feel the prickles of protruding horse hairs.

"Oh, some April maybe.—Well, tell us about yourself."

He did not know how to begin; there was such a bright, sharp little edge in her tone. And there came a rustling in the bushes outside the window and the sudden patter of rain. "I don't think that matters so much," he heard his voice saying. "I a—— Let's talk about somebody else for a change."

"You're the subject I seem to know least about." The words made him uncomfortable. He could not see her face, and mere words like that——

"Phil," he said, coming with frightful suddenness to an impasse. "I've never talked straight to you." He paused. His heart had stopped beating. His brain went round and round and yet there was one small persistent idea pecking away in it.

"Well, whose fault is that?"

"Mine. Mine entirely. You see, there are certain things a man cannot tell a girl right out." He was thinking about Cloud. It was his obvious duty to tell

her about Cloud. He had been wanting to tell her. But how could he? "It would make things clearer, you know. Now, I don't want you to think—well, I just didn't know how to go about it and I didn't think it mattered and to tell you the truth I have missed seeing you—like the devil."

"You make it perfectly clear, Job."

"You see, one hasn't but one life to spend and somehow I've wanted to make something worth while of mine. I've dreamed of going away somewhere. Everybody does, I suppose. I've wished I might throw myself into some great struggle and give all I've got for the great joy of living—really living—once. And I always come back to the thought that there's no such thing as that. That a man has to stick to his everyday work and take what is coming to him and wish right all the time so that in case something does come up he can rise to his emergency and—oh, hell—I beg your pardon—there's so many things like that that a man misses a friend to talk to that he can talk to." He stopped and looked out the window into the warm press of shadows.

"You've come that far?" said Phyllida from her corner, and then suddenly she was doing a curious thing. She came and sat beside him and took his hand. The pounding in his heart was vying with the ache in his throat. He still kept his eyes toward the window.

"Job," she was saying, "you talk very much like a jig-saw puzzle and I—well, let me tell you this one thing." She paused a moment. His hand was upon the sofa and hers covered it with a firm, steady, warm pressure. "There's been no reason why you should have quit coming to see me, Job. Do you understand?"



"Phil! It isn't that at all. You see, I didn't see how I made any difference. It was—well, I did not know what else I could—— You didn't need me. You don't need me. I'll say this: I was the one who lost out on the deal."

"Friends are not so plentiful, Job, that any one can cast them around like a farmer sowing corn." She withdrew her hand. "Now I think I'm going to tell you to go, Job. You see, I am trying to dope things out and I wanted to get you straight——"

At once his concern for himself vanished. A stronger and a clearer desire welled into his heart. He stood up. "Well," he began quite cheerily. "Here's how!"

And just then there was a fumbling at the front door and directly it swung open and there was a murmur of voices. And then the front hall light switched on and Mrs. Coleman's figure became visible, bending over a card table in the hall. A man stood in the doorway, a man in a derby hat and holding a pair of gloves and a stick thrust beneath his arm and projecting out behind. The hall light was dim and they did not stand out too clearly. Mrs. Coleman spoke:

"It's not here, Wally. So trot along. I'll let you know."

The man said something in a low tone.

"No. Not now. I'll let you know. Thank you, Wally."

The door closed softly. Brawn stood in his tracks, silent in the darkness, feeling a strange embarrassment.

"Mama."

Mrs. Coleman looked up. A smile came over her



face and she slipped something into her pocket with a swift, fumbling movement. "You gave me a fearful start."

"I'm sorry."

She came a step or two toward them. "You'll never know what an evening I've had. Exhausting! I'm going straight up to bed." And still she lingered, apparently looking for something. "What time is it—about?"

"A little after nine."

"Good-night, dear."

They heard her steps on the stairs and a moment later the closing of a door and then a child's querulous, high-pitched voice.

Brawn was confused. There was nothing for him to say. It made him feel very queer, what he had just seen. "I a—— I'd better be on my way, I guess."

He could hear Phyllida rising to her feet and he wandered out the hall as casually as he could. Beneath the hall light he turned. Phyllida was standing beside him, her head averted. She was giving her eyes a dab with a pocket handkerchief. She looked up and he saw that she was crying. She tried to smile at him at the same time.

He felt unmentionable depths. A vast trembling seized upon him and a vaster resolve. He reached out his arm and drew her to him. There was an expression in her eyes which he could not fathom—and the tears. He kissed her mouth—there in the dim, yellow light—and there was a great pounding in his heart—ah, her lips were soft. She pushed him away. "Oh, Phil——"

"You must go now, Job.—Go now." There was the oddest, wide-open look in her eyes—of shame and concern. She was opening the door for him.

He picked up his hat and passed through and in the vestibule he again turned to her.

"No, John. Not now. Some other time we'll talk. To-morrow, maybe."

"To-morrow's a long, long time."

She stood silhouetted in the vestibule. Not a sound disturbed Janvrin Street, not a sound save the soft rustling of the elms and the whispering patter of drops dripping on the sidewalk. For a moment he stood beside her, his shoulder touching hers, and she was so shadowy and there was a fragrance in her hair.

"Do you mean it?" he whispered.

"I—I'm afraid I do."

"Then—to-morrow."

"Maybe."

"I'll phone you." He stooped over quickly and kissed her again. It fell tumblewise upon her cheek, just as she was drawing back into the doorway. And then Brawn walked steadily down the steps. "Good-night."

The door closed. For a moment the shadow of the vestibule seemed to be calling him back. But he lifted his shoulders and passed on down the walk.

He went swinging down the street with the elm branches thick above him, a sheltering canopy. Up ahead, the light from the corner sent streaking shadows along the pavement and then came the patter of the persistent rain. He turned up his collar and pulled down his hat and began to sing a foolish little song about the happy coincidence of a diamond's not being

one foot round and a little woman's not being six feet tall. It was a mad, mad world. Just what *had* happened to him? Phyllida—of all people!

He reached the corner and it was raining hard. A man's figure stepped up on the curbstone before him from the wet and glistening street. They met in the glare of the electric light. Brawn had a momentarily unpleasant shock. The face was Jerry Cloud's, white and wan looking under the checkered cap that was dripping moisture from the peak.

"Ho! Old John Brawn! What's the matter? Didn't anybody tell you it was raining?"

"Is it?"

"My God!"

"Gimme something to smoke."

Cloud fished in his pocket. He handed over a crumpled package. "What's up? Somebody tell you there wasn't no hell?"

"They did. But don't *you* count on it." He caught a light from his cupped hands. "Thanks. Going in town?"

"Think not. Good-night."

"Good-night."

They parted: Cloud continuing south; Brawn turning to the left down Appleton Street. In just the minutest way the world seemed less lovely. Where could Cloud be going? Quite likely he was going to see Phil. There was nothing wrong in that. And yet somehow he could not help feeling just that edge of uneasiness that he felt every time Cloud came around. There was no telling what he might do. He had the potentiality of all evil, somehow—and yet he was harmless enough. And Brawn's heart was singing. And he was



resentful that Cloud might be going where he would give the world to be. A curious thing, this thing that had happened to him to-night. She had loved him all along and he had loved her. And then like an ugly, pestering insect, Burton's story came into the corner of his mind. Angrily he thrust it out. The world was like that—seeking to spoil all it couldn't enjoy. But did she really mean it or was she playing with him? What a fool he was to have thoughts like that after the wonderful sweetness of her. What a curious household it was: Mrs. Coleman and the shadowy Wally with his gloves and stick.

A momentary resolve hardened into action and he retraced his steps, back from the car line, back to the corner. The light was swinging gently to and fro upon its bracket. In the south the clouds were breaking and there was a graying luminance there as of early morning. Only it could not be so very late. Brawn stood at the corner of the house for a moment and looked out Janvrin Street. Everything was quiet; no one was abroad. Then as he looked along the faces of the houses—they were all pretty much on a line—he thought for a moment he could see the silhouette of a man's head and shoulders against the sky, as though waiting for something. And the house was about where the Coleman's ought to be. It was too dark to count the houses. But in another moment he decided he had seen no one. And if he had, what was the harm?

He turned on his heel and walked briskly back down Appleton Street toward the car line. The air felt like cold water in his lungs—it was so fresh and fine abroad. And what a complex thing life was. And what a curi-



ous family the Colemans—a real shadow hovering about it. And how gloriously entangled he was now, with everything—so that he couldn't tell "t'other from which." Well, let it be that way. He felt the touch of her lips, sensed the fragrance of her hair.

## CHAPTER IX

**T**HE next morning was an ordinary spring morning, bright and sunny and warm. The new leaves were slowly uncurling in the sunlight and there was a thick powder of pollen all over the pavements in Compton Street.

John Brawn boarded a car at eight fifteen. He pushed his way through the crowd clustered on the back platform. He seemed very grave. Then he found a brace for his back against the rear inside partition and he opened his newspaper and began to read. He was not concerned with the other passengers and their puerile bickerings. He was a settled man, a man with a destiny. He scanned the stock reports but got very little from the inspection. The question arose in his mind: could he get by on what he was making and take on the added responsibility of another? How much was he really making? He did not know. It disturbed him momentarily.

The clank of the heavy car wheels made a monotonous rhythm. The breath of the spring morning was fresh and clean and fragrant and it made a difference to some one that success should attend his efforts. His work at the office was purposeful. He alighted from the car at Jefferson Street, very thoughtful and preoccupied, and was nearly run down by a boy on a bicycle.

At nine o'clock he called up Phyllida.

"I've a surprise for you, Job," she said.

"There aren't any more surprises."

"I'm going away this afternoon."

"That's nice. Where to?"

"And I may be gone quite a while."

He was suddenly disturbed. But he kept on the same light key. "Is that the very latest convention?"

"No," she said. "Mama's a—unwell. I'm to take her away to the springs. It was all arranged for me last night."

"Oh."

He was silent and she seemed to be waiting for his further comment, but none came.

"Perhaps——" She hesitated. "Maybe you can get me a job when I come back."

"Are you going to be gone as long as that?—What is Fielding going to say?"

"I don't know.—I'm not important. They won't know I'm gone."

"What time do you go?"

"Four o'clock.—B. and O."

"I a—— Let's see.—I'll be down. I think I can make it." The world had suddenly changed. One of the sensations he had experienced just before retiring had been a feeling that the essentials of his life were settled—a regretful feeling, in a manner, that there was nothing to lose his way over. But he was not so sure now. "Phil," he said, suddenly anxious, "you've a—— things are not different from what they were last night, are they?"

A faint laugh came to him over the phone. "I'll say they are. Tell you about it all later."

"Why, what's the matter, Phil? Is there anything wrong?"

He was conscious of talking into a dead phone. "Phil!—I say, Phil!" He jiggled the receiver. "Number please," said the operator.

He hung up the receiver and walked away, deep in painful thought. . . .

At three thirty he reached the depot. He was wracked with anxiety and worry. And just twenty-four hours before, he had been comparatively free in his mind! He had an impatient desire to see Phyllida at once—to see her and talk to her and establish in his own mind exactly how things were. There was some sort of funny business going on. Suppose Cloud or Ambrose or both of them should appear? He couldn't endure that.

He looked at the clock. Thirty minutes to wait. There was no telling just when they would reach the station. He couldn't afford to miss any of the time with her. He wished that he had gone out to the house when she had called. But then he wasn't sure. Perhaps they had already come—were attending to their baggage.

He hurried around to the rear of the station and burst through the door into the baggage room. Mrs. Coleman stood before the counter, leaning on it with her elbows. Her back was unmistakable. "If you don't get it on the train, I'll see if I can't find out why—from some one who is responsible," she was saying. The tone was strident. The baggage clerk was busy stamping something with a rubber stamp, a check between his teeth, a flush in his cheeks. Mrs. Coleman did not seem much like a sick woman. Brawn slipped



back through the door, quietly so as not to be heard.

He found Phyllida in the train shed, near the gate, holding Mary by the hand. He tried to read her face but could not. She seemed a little tired—otherwise the same.

“What’s wrong?” he said as he came up to her.

“Hello, Job,” she replied and shook her head, glancing surreptitiously down at Mary who, swinging by one arm, was taking in the drama of the station.

At once he wished the little girl at the bottom of the river or some other such remote place and he cast about for some errand on which to send her. None seemed apparent.

“This is a pretty sudden thing to do, isn’t it?” he said, and his voice trembled just a little. “How are you, Mary? How do you like going away?”

Mary did not answer him. She merely smiled. Brawn was not a great favourite of hers; he could not treat her without abstraction.

He turned again to Phyllida. “I a—— This puts me in a curious position. Of course it’s none of my business but it surely isn’t abnormal for me to want to know a little more about things.”

She gave him a quick look. “I can’t tell you now,” she said hurriedly. “Here comes Mama. We’re—we’re not going to the springs. I told you that this morning because it was easier. Chicago. I’ll write you soon as I can.”

Mrs. Coleman came up. “How do you do, Mr. Brawn.” She smiled at him. “Nice of you to come see us off.—I got them checked, dearie.—What time is it?—A quarter to four?—Hadn’t we better be getting on?” And, as they approached the gate:

"Haven't seen much of you lately, Mr. Brawn. Been away?—Here, dearie, I'll take the coat."

He strove to catch Phyllida's eye, without success. But as they paused just before the gate Phyllida reached out and took his hand and gave it a little squeeze. "I'll write, Job.—Sit steady in the boat—please."

And then they were gone. He watched them cross the tracks and pass along a line of coaches until they were hidden by intervening cars.

He walked dully back through the station and began to climb the hill of Seventh Street. The sky was blue between the roofs and there was a lazy feel in the air. An old Negro coachman standing by a dingy cab of a dying era doffed his tall hat to him as he passed; the old horse lazily flicked his tail and stood with eyes half closed. The sight of such complacency brought upon Brawn such a frenzy of irritation that, had it been possible, he would have run after the train, calling to it to stop, demanding that all this hugger-mugger be explained away. Did she care for him, or did she not? She had squeezed his hand. And last night he had kissed her. Was it that he did not know anything about women? Was he merely a toy to be jiggled up and down on a stick? It seemed to him that fate, or whatever else was responsible, was buffeting him around too freely.

He could not work, so he went to the club. He wandered in and found the place soaked up with the same spring lassitude. Suddenly he remembered it *was* spring. Two men whose faces were familiar but whose names he did not know were standing in the doorway of the cloak-room, talking about the war.

Brawn pushed past them. He hung up his hat on a peg. He chanced to overhear a bit of their conversation. They seemed to be excited over something and one of them was saying that Jerry Cloud had just made a precipitate departure with the ostensible purpose of crossing the border and enlisting with the Canadians. At once a glamour seemed to spread over the provincial atmosphere of the club. He had not guessed that Jerry had had that sort of stuff in him.

## CHAPTER X

**O**F COURSE he did not expect any word that next morning. But in the afternoon Brawn met the postman in the doorway and quickly ran through the mail. A sharp prick of disappointment caught him. There was nothing there. She had not written from the train. *He* would have done so.

That night as he walked home in the shimmering dusk, he felt isolated again. The feeling that he *belonged*, that he was a part of the scheme, the feeling that had given him a sudden, magic dominance, was wavering in uncertainty. The hurrying crowds, home-going, of serious, sober-sided men with newspapers stuck in their pockets, of chattering schoolgirls with arms interlinked—they were wearing their dresses pretty brazenly short these days, he thought—all seemed to be purposeful and happy. He passed an old man in a ragged gray overcoat and an incongruously undergraduate-looking cap with a huge peak. The old man regarded him with vacant rheumy eyes and then wandered over to a window display of hot-water bottles and stood staring at them, hands in pockets. Brawn could feel the contrast between this derelict spirit and the purposeful routine all about it—it was quite keenly evident.

The next morning he had an alert ear for the door. But there was no mail for him. He realized that he was being childish, but then it was natural, he assured



himself, to want to hear—to want to hear, passionately—that was part of the glamour of the awakening. It was new to him—a very beautiful new thing. Perhaps it was not so new to her. His throat had a little dry ache in it and he attacked the sheaf of letters on his desk savagely. He would never know, he supposed, just where he stood with Phyllida—never know just how she was going to react to anything. He would always be exposing himself, taking her at face value. A hot, ugly thought came crowding in his mind. Monday night was possibly nothing new for her—a little pleasant excitement. Perhaps by now it was washed entirely from her mind. He was quite sober and vague and courteous all that morning.

That afternoon he spent running down witnesses and it was late when he returned to the office. An unsuccessful effort to get a comprehensive statement out of an old lady was worrying him as he came up in the elevator. He walked over to his desk in a kind of maze and stood there thinking. And then he saw the unbusiness-like envelope lying on the desk on top of other mail. Instantly the thought of the old woman vanished. He tore open the envelope. He read eagerly. And then the smile died upon his face. He laid the letter down upon his desk. It read:

DEAR OLD THING:

Awfully rushed. Mama did not like the hotel so I had to hunt another. We are at the Cosmopole—get that name! Dizziest crowd of wrecks ambling about you ever saw. Know I'm going to have a riot here. Haven't time for a letter. Will you drop into Fielding's and rescue that purple knit scarf of mine and mail it to me?

Hurriedly,

PHIL.

He had fatuously expected more—a suggestion of understanding, a light touch expressive of the fact that she was missing him, written in the inimitable way of her. Desperately fearful of the sentimental, of the melodramatic, he knew her to be; still—well, he had expected more.

That night he got in a poker game and lost twenty-two dollars. As he got up from the table he felt he was being quite sporting. But when he went to bed, he was regretfully calculating how much that twenty-two dollars would have bought for him. The evening had not been worth that much.

Friday morning he awoke with the conviction that he had been trifled with. He was most insanely irritable. He ate his breakfast in silence, replying to the usual cheery conversation with monosyllables. Mrs. Melton glanced significantly at Mrs. Hocker. “Mr. Brawn,” she said, “I wonder if you’d mind stopping by the Warren Memorial and getting my umbrella. I forgot it Wednesday night. The janitor has it.”

The tone was so timid, the manner so deprecating, that he agreed to do so without thinking. And yet it was six or seven blocks out of his way. Women loved to have men do little chores for them. Ordinarily he would have magnified the opportunity into the realization of genuine service, into the certainty that he was a most agreeable fellow.

He walked along the street over toward the car line, oblivious of the bright sunshine, of the twittering of the birds high up in the trees, of the tootling of a banana man’s horn. He was feeling very, very bitter. It had been more like a telegram than a letter, without the glamour that a telegram carries.

In the street car there was a buzz of excited conversation; men were discussing the action of Congress and the imminence of war, "at last." War! What was war to him?

Friday passed in a cloud of routine. He hardly spoke to any one beyond the necessities of business. And each trip of the letter carrier left him more sullen, more resigned, more convinced than before. At five o'clock in the afternoon he got his hat and went out on the street, determined to send her a telegram that would be a blow in return. He got as far as the telegraph office and then decided there was nothing he could say. So he returned again to his desk.

He went home and went early to bed, but could not sleep. He heard the clock strike ten, eleven, twelve, one, two.

For some reason he felt better Saturday. It was because of a trip he had to take across the river perhaps—a change from the little, obvious runway that his feet had been treading—a sort of magnified "pigs-in-clover," office to court-house to office to court-house. He had his lunch in a run-down hotel and the table linen was ragged and dirty and the food atrocious, greasy and drab. But he enjoyed it.

At four o'clock he came back to the office. Every one had gone. He rummaged about in old files, rooted up some stale correspondence, looked on the various desks to see if by chance anything had come for him. The place was very still. It seemed like a different place, rather musty and inefficient and dull, not at all its everyday look. He went to the window and gazed down upon the street. The few pedestrians seemed aimless and uninteresting.



He decided that he would dine at the club. He looked at his watch. It was five o'clock. He shut his watch and returned it to his pocket. He sighed. And then he walked slowly out of the office to the elevator. As he waited there in the hallway for it, he realized how he hated "law." It was so damned respectable and cut-and-dried. Lawyers were always polite even when they had murder and burglary in their hearts. And they were always waiting for trump cards.

He walked out Fourth Street in a maze, bumping into the senseless crowds of women that hung about the entrance of the "Five- and Ten-Cent Store" like flies about a puddle of molasses. A little farther out he encountered the juvenile crowd, girls and boys in their 'teens, fresh from the movies, giggling and shoving and pushing, filing into a sweet shop where they would squat about inadequate tables and guzzle pasty indigestibles. Humanity, he decided, was a very raw, imperfect thing.

He was not prepared for what he found in the club. Men were clustered about in close little knots, all gravely conversing. The pool and billiard tables were deserted. No one seemed to recognize him and he walked through the hall to the wash-room. One thing he was certain of: Phyllida did not care for him, not in the slightest.

He came back out again and wandered into the library. About a dozen men, of the younger crowd, were standing in the doorway, talking. He caught the word, "War." He stopped and stood there on the edge and listened. He learned, with a dim sense of having been asleep, that Congress had declared



war, that a state of war even now existed. It seemed to him a very impersonal thing, as though it concerned him not at all. One of the men, an officer in the First Kentucky Regiment, a National Guard organization, was laying down some facts to the rest of the men who seemed very much impressed. "We'll be getting orders to-morrow, I wouldn't be surprised." Then he looked very gravely off into space.

"What'll it mean?" asked Brawn of his neighbour.

The man turned to him sharply—he was a young man of prominent family, with plenty of money and intolerant, and with a reputation of general uselessness. "Mean?" he said. "Means we'll all be going over—pretty quick." And then he moved away.

Brawn spied Burton. Burton had meant nothing to Brawn since that little affair, save something to annoy. And Burton was standing over to one side as though not a part of the group. Brawn walked over and took him by the arm. "Looks like business, eh, Burton?"

The man turned and looked at him as though surprised from some unusual depth of thought. There was no trace of resentment or awkwardness in his face when he recognized Brawn. Nor did he seem to be worried. His lips stiffened in a tight line. "Business?—I'll say it does." He looked at Brawn's necktie thoughtfully. "Wonder when they'll be calling us in? Wonder where a fellow could go and enlist—to-morrow?"

Brawn was surprised. "Going in?" he inquired.

"Surely," said Burton. "Aren't you?"

Brawn left him and went out into the hall. He

bumped into George Ambrose hurrying away from the check-room.

"Hullo, John," said Ambrose. "What do you think of it?" And then without waiting for Brawn's reply: "But you don't belong to the Regiment, do you?"

"No," said Brawn.

"Neither do I. Sure sorry I didn't join up last fall. Be sittin' pretty now.—Don't know if they'll take old relics like me, or not."

"Going in?" asked Brawn, his curiosity rising.

"Am if they'll take me. Haven't heard any dope yet, have you?"

Brawn said he had not.

"Well, have to run along. So long, John."

The thing was getting nearer. It was getting to be more his affair. He passed a group of old men, old codgers of the sixties and seventies. One of them, old Mr. Callaway, stopped him on the stairs.

"How's the young man?" he said.

Brawn assured him that he was in tip-top shape. Mr. Callaway was another of his father's friends, and quite loquacious.

"Well," he continued, "you young fellows'll have to be taking it up where we left off. Too old to go myself. Guess you'll all be shouldering muskets and going to France before long."

"Guess so, Mr. Callaway."

A few minutes later a band started up on the street outside and everybody rushed to the door to see what was going on. The band was passing along Fourth Street and Brawn ran down to the corner to see what it meant. It proved to be a Salvation Army band and

the crowd soon dispersed, not being in the mood for salvation. Brawn wandered slowly out Fourth Street. He was beginning to feel vaguely stirred. America was at war. America was at war. Old memories and traditions were coming up out of the past. His father had been with Morgan. That wasn't the "U. S. A." exactly, but it was part of it. There had been some old forbear in the Mexican campaign, old great-uncle Roderick. His people had all taken part in the decisive matters of their day. And this thing was part of *his* day. He suddenly remembered that he had not had his supper; he had forgotten it entirely.

What was there better for him to do, he suddenly asked himself? There were no strings to him. Fifty years before, there would not have been a moment's pause. The city, the community, was a smaller, more closely knit thing, then. In those days the individual could not hide himself from public responsibility. Was it right that he should try to do so now? It made not the slightest difference to any one what became of him. But it made a lot of difference what those dim, forgotten ghosts of forbears should think of him. . . .

"Any leavin's, Mrs. Melton?" he called gaily as he opened the door.

Mrs. Melton looked bewildered. "Why, it's after seven o'clock. I'll——"

"Never mind that," interrupted Brawn. "I'll just go into your pantry and see if I can get myself some scraps."

Mrs. Melton followed him, keeping a watchful eye.

"Oh, Mr. Brawn," she said, rescuing a tottering milk bottle, "isn't it terrible?"

"Mmmm," replied Brawn.



"Do you suppose they'll be forming another Louisville Legion?"

"Haven't heard."

"Of course we couldn't stay out any longer. I just hope we'll go straight in to Berlin."

Brawn attacked another sandwich.

"You'll not be going in—just yet awhile, will you, Mr. Brawn?"

"Dunno. I might." He was beginning to enjoy himself for the first time in four days.

Mrs. Melton hung to him to the foot of the stairs, after he had assuaged his hunger, suggesting direful privations and dangers, but being constantly buoyed up by confidence in the invincibility of American arms and by her wrath at the German Government, a wrath that like a tinder spark glowed and flamed with her breath upon it.

Brawn went upstairs. He started a letter to Phylida. He told her coldly what he was going to do. He cynically alluded to her propensity for playing with fire and to his entire comprehension of such procedure. He hoped she would be having a good time. He read it over. It was really a pretty good letter. And then he tore it up. He had less trouble in going to sleep that night. . . .

Sunday afternoon seemed a long, tiresome prospect. So he got out his cutaway coat, his silk hat, and his cane and prepared to "do about" a bit. He was feeling frivolous. Promptly at three o'clock he called on Betty Hobson to whom he owed a much-overdue dinner call. Betty was of the crop of 1916 and holding on desperately. She came down the stairs, all groomed to the minute in a black velvet afternoon gown, smil-



ing and holding up her head in that fresh girlish way she had cultivated. She seized him by both hands and led him to a sofa in a dim corner of her parlour.

"I'm *so* glad you've come this afternoon," she said. "I was wondering what *had* become of you. I was afraid you didn't like me any more." She gave him a long tremulous look up through her lashes.

Brawn assured her that his devotion had not waned in the slightest and cautiously looked about the room. It was consistent, consistently shaded in dull rose, consistently equipped even to the leather-bound volume of Omar Khayyam on the table by the window.

Betty lolled prettily upon the sofa. Her gown was a marvellous fit and it displayed to an obvious advantage her full, exotic figure and her smooth, white arms. "I suppose," she began, "that you'll be coming to tell me good-bye some of these days very soon now."

Brawn laughed. "I don't know. Feeling pretty yellow about it somehow. I like my comfort."

Her glance glowed like fire. "Oh, I know. That's what you *say*. But they can't keep you out one minute." She sighed and sank back against the cushion, away from him. "What will we do, when all you men are gone?—It's terrible." The buckle of her black satin pump seemed to be loosening and she leaned forward to straighten it and when she had done so she slipped back on the divan, but closer to him by inches. Again she raised her face to his and gazed at him through lids that were narrowed. "I wish I were a man. Staying at home is going to be much the harder. You'll be going down to the train some of these days in your uniform and we'll all be standing around and—kissing you good-bye." She seemed to be

suggesting a bit of informal dress rehearsal with her face uptilted, her lips quivering a little, and her bosom rising and falling perceptibly—and so near.

“And you’ll be doing recruiting duty, before many days, if I tell on you,” Brawn said.

She bit her under lip and sank back into the cushions. “It’s not everybody that I’ll miss,” she said, looking at him very significantly. And then the doorbell rang and they sat in silence, watching each other, and it occurred to Brawn how opportune had been the coming of the war for Betty’s jaded emotions. It meant a wonderful new opportunity to her.

The maid ushered in Ben Cudd. Cudd had a round, fatuous white face, sleepy eyes, and a vast weakness for beer. He frequented such functions, formal and informal, as promised to develop a high fluid content. The combination corkscrew and bottle opener on his key ring was a sure-fire joke to be tried on every stranger. “Hullo, John,” he called as he squeezed Betty’s hand. “Army got you yet?” Immediately he sank into the largest and softest chair and crossed his legs. “They’re goin’ to have a national draft, they say—twenty to thirty—every man that’s physically able. Reckon they’ll have mercy on my alcoholic heart, Bet?”

She was paying no attention, but watched Brawn, who had not resumed his seat. “Why so restless?”

“Benny’s got me worried. I must be on my way.” Already he was weary, his frivolous spell dissolving.

Her eyes were humid with melancholy as she took his hand and held it—longer than necessary.

“I’ll not wait to be drafted—after your hint to me,” he said, but she would not smile. She was making

the war very real to herself. He closed the door on the boom of Cudd's heavy laughter.

The "next" was Romola Wendel.

Romola was a sweet little thing, likewise 1916 model. Her family rated a butler, a huge Negro, very black and known to everybody as "Rollo." He was a grave darky with a bow. He never committed himself. He would see. He ushered Brawn into the parlour, a frivolous green one done in Louis Quinze and with a huge oil painting of Miss Romola in knee dresses—properly juvenile—hanging over the mantel in a heavy gold frame.

Directly, Romola came in. She was petite—barely five feet high—and weighed eighty-seven pounds in the aggregate. She wore ruffles whenever she could, had the slenderest feet and ankles, a shy smile and occasionally a lisp. She smiled at everything, even when she was doubtful if the smiling were proper. She had been raised to be charitable.

She took a seat across the room from John in a stiff, uncomfortable chair. She told him how glad she was to see him. Her eyes grew round and her little round face tried hard to lengthen. "And, oh," she said, "what do you think of the war?"

Brawn paused at the scope of the question. He didn't know for sure. It was pretty bad, he supposed, but it had to come.

"Yes," she sighed. "I suppose so."

There had evidently been some discussion at the family dinner table, for the idea seemed obsessing to Romola. Contrary to her usual divergent custom she returned to the subject, smiling over at him pleasantly: "And will you men all have to go over to France



—in ships? It seems such a funny thing to do—going all that distance to fight men you have never seen.”

It had not occurred to Brawn as ludicrous and he explained to her quietly that it was a matter of ideals that was the yeast in the ferment. Romola was vaguely unconvinced. War was such a useless thing.

Without realizing it, Brawn launched into a one-sided discussion. Ordinarily Romola had passed as a shrinking creature, whom one shielded from all suggestion of life and ugliness and struggle. But apparently she had been doing some thinking on her own and was interested. Moreover, she seemed impressed. From a didactic exposé of the German lack of international morals, Brawn digressed into their manner of waging war. Thence it was a short cry to their atrocities in Belgium. He had seen some hideous prints that the French Foreign Office was having passed about—subjects which he could but barely touch upon in most cases, suggesting the ultimate to her flowerlike curiosity. Two bright spots of red appeared in her cheeks but she seemed keen for more. Directly he caught himself telling her a tale about the German corporation which had secured the franchise for refining human fats and oils, and which had adopted the singularly efficacious method of bundling up the bodies in fagots of threes for easier transportation. Midway in the story he paused, aghast at his temerity, but Romola urged him to go on.

“I think they ought to chop up the Kaiser into little bits,” she protested emphatically when he had finished.

Brawn sat for a moment in silence, wondering on the subtlety of public opinion. It seemed a vast, in-



choate, emotional thing, untouched by reason. And then a clock boomed five. He had sat for more than an hour. He quickly rose to his feet.

"Are you going in?" asked Romola.

"I suppose so—if they'll take me," he replied slowly.

"Come and see me and tell me about it," she urged. And she seemed quite earnest about it.

"No soft stuff in these women," thought Brawn as he started down the street. "They're all keen for a scrap. It'll be popular, all right, all right." And then for a moment he wondered what Phyllida's attitude might be.

He was tired of calling. The social side of life presented no further allurements to him. So he caught the street car and rode to the club. Something seemed to be driving him. There was nothing in this life about Louisville that had the slightest hold on him. He might just as well chuck it.

As he passed through the door of the club he had a sudden inspiration. Colonel Hardaway—the old colonel he had been chummy with at Estill Springs the summer before—lived in Washington. He could put him in touch with the real things. The Colonel had asked him then why he had not gone into the army.

He walked into the writing room and found a vacant table. It struck him at the time that it was an abrupt thing to do. But something fired him from within. He took up a pen and wrote. He made his request terse and to the point. He told the Colonel that he wanted to get into the army—that he wanted to get in in the shortest and quickest way; he wanted to get in the line, wanted no staff work. Would the

Colonel look after his case and advise him what to do, at once?

He addressed the letter, sealed it, and stamped it. And then he walked stiffly out into the hall and dropped it into the mail box. He had the sensation of having taken an irrevocable step. And all his feeling of responsibility seemed to vanish. He came out into the vestibule of the club feeling as free as a wild animal in the woods, and quite as unprotected. He had cast himself into the hopper.

He got on the car and went home, flushed and uplifted and a little solemn. The Brawns were no slacker family.

Mrs. Melton met him at the door.

"Here's a special delivery for you," she said, and handed him a letter.

Somehow it failed to stir him as it should have. He looked at it curiously. Then he thanked Mrs. Melton. He took it upstairs to his room, then he walked over to the window and in the dying light he opened it and read:

JOHN DEAREST:

I've been wondering why it was I have had no line from you. Things have been impossible here—more so than I even expected.

And then came a few lines describing the place and the people.

I didn't tell you why we came here and I shan't now—but later, some time. Only it's all impossible. I thought to-night I had got to the end of my rope. And then I thought of you and your old silly steadfastness and that I could depend on that steadfastness and I felt better—loads.

I couldn't have been like you, Job. Not for one minute could

I. I'd had to have things explained to me—drawn out for me on paper. But you never question a thing. And you *do* care for me, don't you?

Write to me and tell me what you are doing—what you are thinking. And trust me a little longer. We'll be home in about two weeks. I'll tell you about things then—if I can.

As ever,

PHYLLIDA.

## CHAPTER XI

A WEEK later the following letter came:

DEAR JOB:

Our mission is over. The pleasure trip *est fini*. We're due to leave next Tuesday and we'll be taking the day train. That puts us in at seven-thirty.

I've been tight with the news, haven't I? But it's the kind you wouldn't want to hear and it's the kind I haven't wanted to spread.

If anybody ever asks you if Phyllida May is a modern, up-to-date and up-and-coming young woman, tell them, "No." And spell it with a capital N. It may be all right to call spades spades and to look at privacies with a sort of indifference—the scholarly, scientific manner, you know, but——

But I'm raving. Perhaps you haven't heard. Mama and Arthur have had a split up. It's not pretty. The reason for our coming up here—well, I'd better save that till I see you.

Thank God you're a fossil, Job. I revere your venerable bones. I'm off clever, fresh, sparkling people for life.

Keep the brim on your hat. You'll need it. I bought a new coat suit and I do want you to look me over in it.

As ever,  
PHIL.

A curious quiver passed over Brawn as he read these lines. So that had been it. What had Mrs. Coleman gone to Chicago to get? What sort of evidence? Just where did Wally, with his buckskin gloves and walking stick, come in? And then a warm reproach came flooding. What kind of a man was he to question



Phil? Obviously she was not going to talk about her mother.

Unfortunately he missed the train on its incoming. He was terribly upset when he realized it. His watch had stopped and when he reached the station he found only a lonesome group of taxi-drivers and red-caps and a few straggling unfortunates such as perennially inhabit railroad stations. A look at the clock assured him of his misfortune. What would Phil think? That he was holding off because of the news she had sent him?

He jumped into a taxi and was whirled away southward.

Phyllida met him at the door and he felt a leap within him as soon as he saw her. She was even more beautiful than his memory of her. All thought of the past weeks was washed from his mind.

"Well!" she said. "A careless suitor, I'd say." She led the way into the parlour.

"Watch stopped," explained Brawn, a bit breathless. "Must have missed you about five minutes. How are you?"

She was standing by the table with one hand resting on it and she was looking at him steadily. "We just got in. I haven't been diagnosed yet."

"How do you mean?" He came and slipped his arm about her waist. "I got your letter," he said.

Quietly she drew away. "Let's sit down." She pointed to a chair.

Brawn complied, wonderingly.

"I wasn't sure you'd show up or not," she smiled at him. And Brawn's heart smote him.

"Why a——"

"Oh, I know. Maybe you think I don't know what it is to be on the ragged edge of 'being out.' George Ambrose didn't stop coming because he couldn't afford the carfare. Or because he didn't have the time.

"Phil, I haven't heard a thing outside. There's \_\_\_\_\_,"

"That's not exactly what I mean. I can't say just what I do mean exactly. I shouldn't be saying anything. But there are some girls that men just cannot look at without giving them a beckon with their shoulder and a wink. And there's nothing the girl can do to prevent it."

Brawn was aghast. "Why, Phil. What's come over you? There's no excuse for your talking like that. You didn't get me out here to tell me that, I hope?"

"I didn't get you out here at all. You came." Her voice suddenly softened and she shifted her gaze from his face. "I just thought I had better come out with it. You see a woman's different. In some subtle fashion she is of the same fabric with her background.—There. That's awful of me.—At least that is the estimate the world puts upon her. Especially when she is a weak clinger like me.—Job!" She turned to him suddenly. "Can you get me something to do?—A sizable job for a girl with a strong back and a feeble mind?"

"Why, I might. How about Fielding's?"

"More of a job than that even. You see, I have to take care of myself now."

"Why, yes, I suppose I could. What do you want to do?"

"You see, it was all right living off of some one else's money—almost anybody else's money so long as there

was enough of it. That's the kind of woman I was. But I can't live off my mother's alimony."

Brawn was silent. He realized what it was costing her to tell him these things. And in spite of himself something within him instinctively recoiled. Phyllida's cheeks were pink.

"However," she continued, "here I am taking it for granted it will make no difference with you—that you are a thick or thin friend of mine. Well, never mind. Take it or leave it. It's not hard to say that you can't find a job for a person like myself."

"Phil." He got up and came and stood before her and held her with his eyes. "Listen. I know I deserve your thinking almost anything of me. But let me tell you this: As long as you'll let me, I'll stand by you. And anything I can——"

"Speech! Speech!" she cried. The tears glistened in her eyes. "See! I'm a hysterical fool. But to tell you the truth, these past two weeks have been hell, Job. You see, Mama wanted to get some evidence to use on Arthur and she was following up a lead somebody got for her here and every day there would come to the hotel the worst specimens—— But forget it! How about you, Job? Been hitting the ball?"

"Every day. Made some difference not seeing you, though."

"What in the world did you do in those thirty-odd drab years before I came into your life?"

He grinned. "You found me the wreck I was."

Silence. Brawn could hear the dull tread of footsteps on the floor above and the occasional hum of distant conversation. There was a musty staleness in the air of the room, for a breath of "Blackberry



Winter" had prevented the raising of the windows. Suddenly he was overcome with a desire to take her from this place. She sat, staring at the carpet, her profile silhouetted against the lamplight, and touched with an ethereal wanness. There was a thrill in his heart. He was the nearest person to her. That was evident. There would always be a mystery, a glamour about her, he thought, elusive, undefinable, at times inarticulate as she was. And that loveliness—loveliness of spirit as well as of body—might be his for the asking if only——

She suddenly looked up and the old expression was again in her eyes. "There! That's settled. You see, I wanted your friendship and the only way I knew how to get it was to ask for it. And I've virtually thrown myself at your head. There's a queer streak in our blood, that way, I guess. But I've got it, haven't I?"

"What?"

"Your friendship."

"It's more than that I wanted to give you all along."

"Tut, tut, Job."

"The chance to show it *all* the time," he went on doggedly. "It takes more than the mere recognition of friendship for that. We've understood each other, Phil. From the first, I've felt it."

"Job!—You romantic liar! Why, I haven't even understood myself. And as for you—fathers in heaven!—Yes, you have rare insight. But I love you for it. And you do such delightfully obvious things. And you're honest. And I can count on you when I'm down in spite of the horrid things I said awhile ago. I oughtn't to marry you, Job. I'd make you miserable. But some day I'm afraid I'll have to—if you ask me."



"I'm not so sure you'll do that after all, Phil."

"Oh ho!" she shouted softly. "So that's where the wind blows. Yes. A man will not be forced. Not for anything in the world. And what might your manly purpose be? Do you propose selfishly to exist on your ill-gotten gains and not assume the cares of a family?" Even as she spoke he could not feel for sure that she had made up her mind about things—that she might not be just as elusive as ever.

"That's the point. I mayn't be earning them—so very much longer," he said soberly.

She looked up quickly, her manner changing. "How's that, Job?"

He paused before replying. "I've gone in the army. I've—sent in my name."

They sat there, looking at each other, with the pink glow from the china lamp-shade sending little circles of barred shadows across them, and for the life of him he could not tell at the moment whether he were sorry, or insanely happy, or afraid. So close do these prime emotions lurk, one to the other.

Then she smiled at him, a crooked, uncertain sort of smile. "Why, of course," she said. "You would. Why, there's nothing else to do, is there?" She rose to her feet and he did likewise. "You see, Job," she went on, "how twisted all my sense of values is. It gives me an idea. I can see a way out—for me, too."

"How's that?" said Brawn.

She was walking toward the door and he stood by his chair watching her, unwilling. "Oh, I'll have to think about it first.—But, Job, you'll have to go now. I—I can't think when you're sitting there, looking at me."

He came and got his hat. As he stood beside her, feeling somehow that he was divining her innermost thoughts, and yet conscious of a certain impending curtain that might drop and obscure her at any moment, he had a sense of what a curious drama he and she were playing. Even in his shaken emotion it was most intensely interesting to him. It kept him consistent in his part. And he made no effort to kiss her, to take her into his arms, which would have been the conventional thing to do. He behaved as he felt she would have wished him to behave. He took her hand and pressed it a moment. "I'm glad you've come home," he said.

She was still very thoughtful. Almost she had not heard him. Then she looked up. "It's going to be a tight, personal little old war," she replied. "Good-night, John."

## CHAPTER XII

**T**HERE'S the shirts, the flowers, the license, the ring, the railroad tickets—let's see. Have I forgotten anything, Mowbray?" Brawn stopped dead in his tracks and addressed the anæmic, blond young man who accompanied him. It was nearly noon and August and sizzling hot. "Seems to me I had six things to attend to. What have I forgotten?"

The young man bored into him with a look of intensity. Then his face lighted. "It's the cards. You wanted to stop at Fielding's and get the cards—the new ones you ordered." He paused and watched Brawn's face for a premonitory guidance as to what would be done next.

"So I have," replied Brawn with satisfaction. "Well, no harm done. Can get 'em this afternoon. There's no hurry." Stiffening quickly and with a look of tremendous gravity, he acknowledged the salute of a private soldier as the latter passed them. He did it a little too quickly, a little too stiffly, he thought, when the man had passed. "If it's just the cards, I'm all right. Let's go home." Slowly he resumed his way and as he walked he drew out his handkerchief and mopped his face. "Say, Mowbray," he added, suddenly turning again to his companion, "have I sweated up the tips of my collar?—The uniform collar, I mean. If you sweat up this serge stuff the stain never does come out."

"No," said Mowbray after a careful scrutiny. "It's all right so far. Pull your stock up a little higher. It'll protect it." Mowbray was taking the occasion even more gravely than Brawn. "Have to wear those—those—those blouses all summer?" he inquired.

"On dress, yes—all the time. In the field we wear only our shirts."

Mowbray speculated on the tropical *négligé* of American troops. "Here's a car," he cried suddenly, darting for the curb.

But Brawn was unmoved. "Let's walk," he suggested coolly.

"It's ten blocks."

"What's ten blocks? By the time you've marched over the whole state of Indiana with a pack on your back, a few odd miles more or less won't make any difference in your life."

Mowbray abandoned the car—Brawn's manner was bristling with assurance—and together they resumed their *hegira* with long swinging strides. Every few minutes Mowbray would catch a surreptitious glance at Brawn, an inquiring glance, in a way, to see if by chance his companion showed the slightest signs of wear and tear. For himself, he was consumed by a raging heat that reduced his clothing to a sodden pulp, sent a scorching and stinging fire into his face, and set his heart to pounding in his throat. And Brawn marched on relentlessly with a slight scowl on his face. Mowbray was an accepted candidate for the second officers' training camp. He therefore had an open mind on military matters.

"Hike much?" he inquired at length.

Brawn was watching out of the corner of his eye the



progress of two interesting-looking young women across the street. "Eight hours a day," he responded laconically. "Sometimes at night somebody would remember and take us out for a few more miles." The young women proved to be strangers and Brawn turned his attention exclusively to Mowbray. "They must be expecting to open up the war when we get in. If we can't march fifteen or twenty miles a day we won't keep fit. Have to march over into Germany and Russia and down into Spain. You want to go in the artillery, Mowbray."

Mowbray felt a chill spasm pass over his spare frame. "Don't know how I managed to get by 'em, anyway. I was underweight and my right eye is on the bum—twenty fifteen, wasn't that it?—One of the doctors, the Captain, said I had a hernia." He plugged along thoughtfully with the perspiration rolling down his cheeks. "But I got in." He smiled wanly at Brawn.

"They don't know what they're doing, half of them. That's why they make us hike. Keeps us busy. Just make up your mind that you've more intelligence than two thirds of the generals and colonels and stick to your knitting and don't answer back and they'll give you a commission. Only you'll have to learn how to hike. It's the mark of superiority."

"Did they give out many commissions, John?" inquired Mowbray after several minutes of silence.

"About 50 per cent. Surely did weed them out there for a time. You want to stand in with your company commander. I had the inside track with mine. Had hard luck, though. My hobnail shoes were too big for me and they rubbed a hole in my heel.

I had to drop out in some of the hikes. Some of the other men lost out for less than that. As it was I only got—this.”

“I’ll be tickled to death with a second lieutenancy,” Mowbray breathed. “What do you have to do to wear boots?”

They finally reached Compton Street and a shaded stretch of pavement. And in a few more moments Brawn was ringing the familiar door bell. The two men stood posed on the flagging of the vestibule and mopped their foreheads. Then the door opened.

“Come in, come in,” cried Mrs. Melton with strained heartiness. “You’ve not been walking in this sun, have you, Mr. Brawn?—Pardon me, lieu—*ten*—ant Brawn.—Oh dear, oh dear!”

“Mr. Hicks, Mrs. Melton.” They stepped into a delightful coolness. “Mr. Hicks is to be my best man.” Mr. Hicks looked more like a beet peeled for pickling. He shook Mrs. Melton’s hand without enthusiasm.

Mrs. Melton stood against the wall and gazed with speculative eyes. The manner was compelling. “So this is the day!” she said slowly and softly.

It was unescapable. Brawn paused and turned, one foot on the bottom step. “This is the day,” he admitted, and smiled at her.

Her eyes were travelling over him from his damp, matted hair to the dust-streaked leather puttees. “Your soldier clothes are becoming to you,” she decided impersonally.

“Oh, this,” said Brawn, “is just a duty uniform. You must see the other one I have upstairs. Pretty nifty, eh Mowbray?”

Mrs. Melton bit her lip. Brawn was standing with one foot on the stair, smiling at her kindly, and then her lips began to tremble. Suddenly the tears welled into her eyes and Brawn was stricken with dismay. Her face began to work though she kept her eyes steadfastly upon Brawn's face. 'Oh,' she faltered tremulously, 'I don't—see how—it's possible.' And giving her head a little shake she fled back down the hall.

Brawn followed Mowbray Hicks up the stairs and into his old room. He stripped off his coat and collar, his shoes and his puttees, and flung himself upon the bed and stared for a long time at the ceiling. Mowbray meanwhile busied himself with wandering about the room, inspecting the pictures.

"They all take it like that," commented Brawn at length. "They're always thinking they can look behind the screen.—You don't act as if you were tired. Why don't you sit down?"

Mowbray gave a coloured print a detailed scrutiny, bending far over the better to see it. Directly he turned about and walked over to a rocking chair, a black scowl on his face. "Emotional," he said shortly. His voice was deep and vibrant. . . .

There was an uninterrupted burr of voices in the parlours of 1324 Janvrin Street that night. The Colemans had thrown the ground-floor front rooms together by the simple expedient of pushing wide the folding doors and in the centre of each room were clustered groups of men and women talking to each other with that restraint that is the Siamese Twin to formal dress among the middle-aged and the elderly. The lights in the chandeliers were a bit dim and yet they exposed the ancient fixtures most unkindly; fixtures



that had been originally meant for gas. The corrugated, saucer-like shades looked wan in the light. Palms and twisted ropes of smilax softened naked corners and tall vases of sumptuous peonies, placed here and there on the mantels and cabinets and upon every piece of furniture possessed of a flat top, brightened up the chambers as fresh linen brightens up an old suit. The little knots of people were not hard, fast knots, but broke up and intermingled one with another, buzzing agreeably the while. There was a look of charitable and happy expectancy upon the faces of all. In short it was not a strictly smart affair. Every now and then the front door would open and waft inward a fresh cool smell of grass—for the lawn had been freshly clipped only that afternoon. With the smell would come a delightful coolness and the soft sound of swishing water across a hot pavement. Once, could be heard quite distinctly, as the door swung inward, the sound of the street-sprinkler thumping with his stick on the hollow barrel of the sprinkler tank. And each fresh arrival would bring to the widening group his increment of smile and expectant greeting.

As the evening progressed it was noticeable that the crowd assembled was not a stereotyped crowd. There was quite a liberal sprinkling of elderly people, a uniform or two, some ravishing youth and beauty, some quite eccentric ensembles. There were the Reverend and Mrs. Tinker; the former with his booming, cheery voice, his graying hair, his upright carriage, his near-sighted eyes; Mrs. Tinker smiling a bit vaguely and wishing that her two hundred and forty pounds might be more generously supported than by two inadequate feet, but happy and friendly and with but one worldly



concern, namely, who should be predestined to motor them home. And there was old Mr. Wabnitz, quite deaf, and smelling a bit distantly of hot, orthodox cooking, and blinking expectantly at the door every time it opened, meantime speculating deeply on the decadence of the marriage convention. And there was Mr. Hodges with his asthma, gallantly forgetting all discomfort as he stood by the buffet holding Betty Hobson's errant attention by sheer force of his gallantry. And there were the cousins from Fayette County, and the spinster trilogy: Miss Jenkins, Miss Blunk and the lumberman's helper; and Charlie Cunningham and Major Crobin—a youth of twenty-six—tall and straight and resplendent and not feeling quite sure just what the manner of a major ought to be, and therefore very cautious and circumspect and solemn. And finally—with a belated inwafting of the door—the Reverend Mr. Dollard, with his clerical collar and carrying a small valise, came breathing through his nose and carefully and modestly watching his step across the dim hall carpet to forbidden and unexplored regions of back hall. There was an immediate change in the pitch and timbre of the parlour buzzing upon his arrival. And every now and then there would be a short period of complete silence.

The clock on the dining-room mantel struck eight. The hush was absolute. And then came a stirring from the hall and heads were lifted and necks strained. A young man in uniform came and stretched a white ribbon across the front room, crowding the guests into the back parlour. There was whispered speculation as to who he might be.

And then came another sound—a soft rustling—

from the hall, and then four persons came walking slowly, all abreast, into the parlour.

On the left came Phyllida on the arm of a withered old man in a rusty dress suit and wearing an old-fashioned turn-down collar. His legs were bowed and very thin and he was not too steady on them. His hair, satiny and white as snow, was brushed back from his forehead and there was an arrogant expression on his lined old face. At his appearance, the buzz sprang up again in the back parlour, then slowly died away. The whisper came that it was old Captain Jarrup, Phyllida's great-uncle from the Confederate Veteran's Home in Pewee Valley.

On the right stalked John Brawn and his best man, Mowbray. It was an awkward moment and one that had met much previous criticism. But the lay-out of the rooms and the narrowness of the hall had permitted of no other arrangement, and the four of them arrived at the improvised altar at exactly the same time. There, the captain stepped modestly back. And Mowbray, felt, of a sudden, most treacherously and nakedly exposed. For his costume did not harmonize; his shoes were fearfully wide and fearfully yellow; the collar of his khaki blouse was two inches bigger around than his new cambric stock and it gaped so that he could stick his chin into it, or so he imagined. Moreover, his blouse and trousers were not of the same colour, for the blouse was a borrowed one and yellowish, while the trousers were fresh from the tailor's and were undoubtedly green. And a mist kept gathering on his glasses.

A wedding ceremony is a breathless, dewy thing, like sunrise on new grass. It marches in the same deathless

band of memories with Spring and Youth and Hope. It is therefore Beauty nigh to tears. Phyllida wore white satin—and a veil. And John filled out his uniform bravely, so that there was never the slightest thought of a wrinkle. His new cordovan puttees were polished to the ultimate shine that leather will take—the bow in his legs was hardly noticeable.

The hush that settled over the two rooms was more than a hush of expectancy. A something else seemed to hover over their heads. Into the hearts of every man and woman standing there, came an unmistakable sense of the great Uncertainty; and likewise in the two backs with unanimity presented, the answer to it: complete disregard. Their replies, following the Reverend Mr. Dollard's promptings, and coming in the stillness like drops of water falling into a cut-glass bowl, merely indorsed this disregard. They knelt. The Reverend Mr. Dollard pronounced the words and they rose to their feet and turned about and faced the gathering. On the face of each was a look of expectancy, a rather eager looking ahead. It was noticeable. And for the moment there was not the usual breaking in of friends and congratulatory relatives. Instead, all seemed to hold back, and a slight whispering arose in the far corners of the rooms.

Then Mrs. Coleman, restraining herself no longer, flung herself upon them with a cry and clutched her daughter in a most untidy embrace. Brawn had a well-nigh irresistible stirring of revulsion. Mrs. Coleman buried her face on Phyllida's shoulder and her back shook and heaved. She was wearing an elaborate evening dress of lavender and satin that was tight and



cut fearfully low. Her back and arms, whitened to the hue of chalk, needed of all things a thorough bloodletting, a thorough cleansing. She looked as if she might not even bleed red. But Brawn's feeling passed with the instant and directly they were swept into the breakfast room where the bride's table had been spread. "We've got to have a fussy wedding, Job," Phyllida whispered to him as they crossed the threshold and stood gazing at the cake and the candles and the decorations.

What followed then was merely a blurring picture to Brawn. There were laughter and foolish speech and an indeterminate sense of food passing his lips—somehow the small iced cakes were more palatable to him than anything else. He ate five of them. And every now and then he would catch a look at Phyllida and she would look back at him, and he would be wondering of what she was thinking. And before he knew it he was waiting in the upstairs hall for her. In her travelling suit she joined him and together they came down the stairs and there was a bit of cheering and some hand-clapping and a babble of congratulations and advice and best wishes and a handful or two of rice. But of boisterousness—not a trace. The last thing that Brawn seemed to remember as they stood for a moment in the vestibule was the face of Mowbray Hicks, standing there holding the door open, with his glossy yellow hair slicked back across his forehead, his glasses and his enormous, ill-fitting collar. He was staring after them, wide-eyed, solemn—almost fearful.

And then, down the steps, off into a warm dark stretch with here and there a flashing light and the



calls of chauffeurs springing up of a sudden, reached the night. Three days! Three days! Three rapturous days with the woman beside him. A warm, alluring prospect! Three days of understanding and discovery! And after that——

## CHAPTER XIII

**J**OHAN BRAUN fell into the whirlpool. And having so fallen he had no chance to speculate on the sensations incident thereto. At times he would find ideas pecking away in his head quite apart from the mad business of war.

He was sent to Texas, to San Antonio, to be assigned there to the Ninetieth Division that was to be formed. He left Louisville on the night train for St. Louis. There was a blurr of blue-black shadows and the flash and sputter of the arc lights about the platform. There were little groups of tense, emotional men and women here and there, in the middle of each a khaki uniform. There were much breathless running about and the shouts of porters and transfer men, and a stream of incoming passengers that, as they passed these little groups with their khaki nuclei, gave them curious and interested glances. Beyond the edge of the station shed gleamed a patch of stars, soft and peaceful and winking, and every now and then in the lull there would come creeping up the mutter of the Falls churning away at the rocks, off to the north. Braun and Phyllida stood away to themselves, without speaking—they had come alone—and though the surge of people beat to and fro about them, they seemed unmoved. Then some one was calling the

train and Brawn felt a bit dazed. He heard Phyllida's voice, felt the pressure of her lips on his—light, cool, steady—looked into her eyes an infinitesimal moment, and was swept away. "Remember that I'm fixed, you know. Look out for yourself," came floating to his ears, and then there was a kaleidoscope of moving figures, a thick blue cloud in a stuffy smoker, much jabbering and laughing, the roar once more of the Falls through the open window, much nearer and more insistent, and then the lurch of the starting train. A brief passing of an army of winking lights below them and to the right as they swung out upon the bridge, a steady warm breeze blowing down the river and two twinkling eyes approaching beneath a blurred column of smoke that melted off into the gray, and the thought: "It's the last time I may be seeing it, perhaps"—such was the passing.

Company I, Three Hundred and Fifty-Ninth Infantry, claimed him upon arrival. He was at once lost in a bewildering maze of duties, of cross purposes. The army seemed nothing but a huge game of getting out of trouble. The Regulations and the Drill Manual seized hold on his brain and held it fast. The men were green, fresh from the ranches of Texas and the oil fields of Oklahoma. Up through the School of the Soldier and the School of the Squad he took them; he wore his voice to a shred and his temper to a filament. It was "Oh, Lieutenant, this—" and "Oh, Lieutenant, that—." He wondered if Captain Shields did any work at all. There came French lieutenants with their grenade manuals; there came English captains and sergeant-majors who laid down the doctrines of machine gunnery and bayonet practice and were

dogmatic to the point of intolerance about it. Brawn forgot Louisville, forgot law, forgot there was a war in Europe for long stretches at a time, forgot sometimes there was a woman he called his wife. It was "Squads right, march," and "Sir, the guard is formed," and "Prepare for inspection"—a thousand biting phrases burnt like raw flame into his consciousness along with a carking fear lest he be doing something wrong.

Spring came unheralded—the spring of 1918. There were whispered rumours of entrainment, rumours escaping like heady vapours through the seams of a bursting cask. And they crept into the camp with their miasmatic toxines, stewing and moiling and suggesting, brewing in men's minds a devil's brew, filling hearts to bursting, stretching nerves to the breaking. It was quite uncalled for, quite inappropriate, the order that Brawn got on the morning of May 15th—telling him to report to the Depot Brigade, for duty. It was almost an hour before the significance of the order dawned upon him. He could not understand. Why, he had been getting by in fine style; they had almost nothing against him, merely the merest of trifles. His captain had left him almost a free hand and his major—well, he was on the closest terms with the major. They used to argue nightly—their rooms were adjoining—on politics and finance. Brawn had had to explain in detail the workings of the Federal Reserve Banking Law one evening before he could get the major to yield his point.

At first he felt numbed and helpless, almost like getting over a drunk. And then he had a swelling of resentment and an uncertain sense of putting off the



*waiting* for a longer time. He said very little about it in his letter to Phyllida. (Phyllida had gone into the Red Cross and was stationed at Camp Sherman. They had arranged it before he had left.) And then he plunged again into the fury of preparation. If anything his duties were even more manifold, more nagging, petty and exacting. There was a mountain of paper work to be climbed over daily: service records, insurance records, reports. Down through channels would come the most pressing calls for reports on the number of men available for drill, for guard, for transfer, for discharge under "S. C. D." Headquarters would want to know immediately how many men had had experience as motor mechanics, how many men liked to sing, how many Conscientious Objectors refused to carry arms—every conceivable reportable thing. There would be a tremendous impatience evident and the work would stop momentarily until the information was returned, only to be followed by another request more trifling, more insistent than before. There were countless inspections of barracks and men. A burnt match on the drill field was enough to raise a storm; a spot on a man's mess kit meant a reprimand for the company officer. It was a time of tremendous rush. Increments from the draft were coming in like vast waves at flood tide. Every four weeks there would be an entirely new company, and with each change would come nights of paper work, getting service records ready. Each service record called for twenty-one initials, to say nothing of the respective endorsements—all required to be in the commanding officer's own handwriting. It was to insure his exact personal supervision over every detail

in every man's record. Frequently there would be from two hundred and fifty to three hundred men to be transferred over night. The commanding officer rarely saw the service records on such occasions. Every man in the company office would be busy signing initials—the initials of the commanding officer. Once there was a terrific upheaval owing to a difference in opinion as to where the endorsement regarding the amount of insurance that the man carried should be stamped. One group held it should be in the blank space on page nine; another group, the group receiving the transferred increment, insisted that it should be on page seven, in fact produced a brigade order to support its views. The major in command of the first group likewise produced an order from another source but likewise irrefutable. The earth quaked. The war, for a moment, stood still. And twelve hundred men were homeless, loafing about against the barrack walls until the matter was settled—stormily. For a time Brawn thought he would go mad from the pressure. There were so many orders to be observed that it kept one company clerk busy seeing that each company officer saw the latest word on each subject and then filing the order away so that it could be found again as soon as it was rescinded. And all the time there were drill and inspection and games for morale and lectures and special training and reports. It was a terrible machine, with the cogwheels rough cast and poorly fitting, but impelled from behind by an irresistible force. It was no place for a sensitive nature, nor a sullen one. The great marvel was the spirit of the men. They sped through the machine for the most part silently and were gone.

In September there appeared the first shoots of a new division, the Eighteenth. And there came news of the departed Ninetieth, glorious news, disturbing news. It had been in action. It had carried its objective. It had lost heavily. The war moved suddenly nearer. It stood, a dark red figure, on the horizon. Brawn wondered, one evening as he read a scrap of paper about the St. Mihiel, how he might have been faring if that order had not come through for him. Then one day there came an order with a long list of names. In the list was his name. He and the rest were to report for duty on the following morning at the headquarters of the Eighteenth Division—the new one. Once again the wheel clicked as it moved on. And then came again the sombre, business-like, calmer preparation for the inevitable, instead of the madness of the clearing house.

One night in late September, Brawn sat in the Red Cross hut idly looking over an illustrated magazine. It was several months old but interesting in spite of its age. One of the events of interest depicted there was the sinking of the transport *Carpathia*. There were two or three pictures of survivors and their rescuers. Brawn idly turned the pages. In the script appeared a short account, and then a list of names. He scanned the list. He came to the name, "Ambrose, George—Louisville, Kentucky." Softly he laid the paper down, rose to his feet and walked out of the hut. The import of war sped home. He had been preparing for a year—for more than a year. But his time would be coming. He had been spared for a year—used for a year. George Ambrose—had been wasted. Drowned in the water in April. He had not even



known that Ambrose had gone in. And then the system closed in over him and he forgot again.

Time surged relentlessly on. The division was whipping into shape. He was living the same thing over again. Only instead of trench warfare, they were going back to the old open formations of musketry and manœuvring. Pershing was going to force a new method on the Boche.

Out of an open sky came the Armistice. The wheels slowed down. It was like winding a watch up to the limits of the mainspring and then forgetting to wind it at all. For a short time the drilling persisted. But no one took much interest. There were frequent rumours that the Eighteenth would be sent overseas anyway, as there was no certainty as to how the Germans would behave. But things were getting slacker. They went out for two weeks on the rifle range and dawdled about. Men were going A. W. O. L. now. Rarely had they done so before. Then came a flood of requests for discharge. There was a short period of uncertainty and then all of a sudden the authority came through and men were filtering out slowly and vaguely, not in the whirlwind manner of their arrival. It was a most curious time.

Some officers put in for their discharge and were let go. It made Brawn suddenly restless. But there was nothing for him to go home to. Phyllida's letters coming at irregular and infrequent intervals showed a change in attitude. There was not the lofty enthusiasm in their tone. But the Brawns were at least making out as they were and there was a lot to be done in the army, still. So John let things drift.

The influenza epidemic came and went leaving death



and ruin in its wake. Christmas came, a belated feast. It was as festive as a cold Sunday supper eaten from the ice-box. January slipped past and February with the division dwindling to skeleton size, and weakened by the anaemia of indifference. Little shoots of grass were peeping in fence corners; the crocuses were blooming in the front yards of houses in the town. There came a softness in the air, the premonition of spring, and the nights stretched out across the barren plains, deep, calling, mysterious. And Brawn shut his eyes to the future.

On March 1st he was transferred to the Demobilization Detachment; the division no longer had strength enough to stand. He followed the truck carrying his effects over to the farthestmost northeast corner of the camp, feeling like a pariah, slightly curious as to what might be in store for him now. He found a blackened and disorderly area, slack discipline, a dying morale and another mountain of paper work. He was put in command of a rehabilitation company made up of men with venereal disease. It was his duty to see that the men were kept in quarantine and sent daily for treatment in formation. There was nothing military about it. He found the officer personnel at very low ebb. For the most part the officers were either ex "non-coms" elevated to the rank of officers, or immature youths with no civilian prospects to return to, or the frank adventurous type who were ineffectually hoping for a chance to join the regular army without loss in rank. Brawn was soon disgusted. There was a putridity that seemed to hang above the whole enclosure. The officers frankly loafed as much as they dared. There was a little guard duty, a pretence at

inspection, a few blatant and garish dances in the old Red Cross assembly room and a great stalling, a universal putting off of the eventual hour of discharge. And spring, with its soft breezes, its countless suggestions of lazy pleasures, was weaving its enchantment about him. He felt played out. He shrank from the task of starting over, scrambling for himself. He now had two to look after and while his pay was modest—he had been promoted to First Lieutenant the preceding September—still he could get along on it. If he were discharged he would be up to his neck in uncertainty. There was nothing else to do but drift apparently.

One afternoon after retreat—it was about the middle of March—he rode into town. It was an afternoon of hazy sunlight, with soft mists veiling the bright glare, and a close, warm atmosphere hugging the earth, fragrant and moist. There was a noticeable scarcity of soldiers and to what soldiers remained the populace seemed to pay no attention. A few months before, San Antonio had been nothing more nor less than an armed camp, stern, precise, iron-gripped. Now it had relaxed into a post-carnival spirit and was drowsing in the sun. Brawn wandered into a hotel, went out into the patio and sat down at a table in a far corner beneath a huge spreading palm. He dined on shrimp cocktail, fried chicken, candied yams and biscuits, and the stringed orchestra hidden behind a bank of palms thrummed plaintively away until the winking lights came on in the shrubbery. Life was infinitely slack and lustreless. He paid his bill, got up, stretched, and wandered out on the street.

He walked along watching the lights on the Gov-

ernment Building over across the square beyond the Alamo. There was a soft turquoise shimmer in the sky. Automobiles went hurrying by with their laughing freights: girls in flimsy dresses, O. D. uniforms. In another month it would be like this in Kentucky. He would get an apartment, a little apartment, and he and Phil would move into it right off. They would have a small apartment so that Phil would not have much work to do. It might be a good thing to get his discharge at once and go back and see about getting a job again. Nothing would ever be accomplished with him sticking around in San Antonio. He had decided definitely against San Antonio. If he stayed around much longer he would do a "Rip Van Winkle." Phil had said nothing on the subject. He supposed she was getting along all right. But to have her—in Louisville—in spring! In a flash he decided. He ran for a jitney that was wheeling away from the curb and caught it on the run. He would go back to camp, down to the company, and make out his request for discharge at once. If he waited he might change his mind, like a fatuous lotus eater, and stay on and on.

The camp seemed like a grotesque, bare ruin when he returned to it, but he had no eyes for its imperfections. He hurried down the dusty street to his barracks and burst into the office. A man in a kitchen chair propped against the wall at a precarious angle, opened his eyes and blinked as he entered and then slowly rose to his feet. There was a single electric light hanging above the table which served as Brawn's desk and a motionless blue cloud hung in horizontal strata above the desk and stretched out from the light in airy tentacles. There was a dim murmur of voices



over somewhere behind the partition in the barracks, and an overpowering smell of creosote.

"Want to use the typewriter a minute, Sergeant," he said as he sat down.

The sergeant stirred himself. There was a forced alacrity in his voice. "Some mail on the desk for you, sir." He came and laid two letters before him.

Intent on the wording of his discharge request, Brawn opened the first letter without noticing the envelope. Carelessly he spread the paper on the table at his side. And then all of a sudden he pushed back his chair, struck the table top with a resounding smack of his open hand and smiled. The sergeant was watching him respectfully.

"Good news, Lieutenant?"

Brawn composed himself. "Not so bad," he replied, with a thoughtful frown upon his face. "Here, Sergeant, take a letter, will you? Through military channels." He picked up a pencil and inspected it carefully. "I'm getting the offer of a job. Who do these discharge requests go to, Sergeant?"

The days dragged on leaden feet. Each day, at noon and at four in the afternoon Brawn would drop in at headquarters. "Any news for me yet, Sergeant Major?" he would say. And there would be none. He wrote to Phyllida: "Get out as soon as you can. Hodges and Smith want me to go to work for them. My discharge is coming through any day now. I'll wire you soon's I know."

The company area seemed intolerable. The spiritless file of men standing out in line before the barracks, waiting for the command to march to the dispensary.



and then back again—and then wait for another day—seemed to Brawn the most hopeless symbol in the world. Gradually, one by one, he felt the bonds slipping. The major in command of the Detachment was likewise a decaying spirit, dying slowly of rust, a figure for which one should feel sorry. The reveille bugle no longer carried that strident, imperious command; Brawn slept through it frequently now. He signed the morning report, which the sergeant placed each morning on his desk, with a feeling of contempt for it. No one ever read it. “Non-coms” copied it in the consolidation. There were long hours of loafing about in the sun, of walking about from building to building, putting up a vague pretence of being busy. And in his mind would come rosy drifts of life as it should be. Ambition came and plucked furtively at his sleeve. He would be a better man, a more resourceful man, for having served. He would if only that discharge ever came through.

One morning, at about eleven-thirty—it was a steaming hot morning with clouds gathering on the western horizon like the vapours above a kettle—the orders came. The smug little Mexican orderly slid into the office with them and stood back while Brawn signed his name in the book. With trembling fingers Brawn spread out the papers on the desk. They had come at last. He was ordered to appear before the discharge board on the next day for his detailed papers and then before the medical board for physical examination on the morning following. He would be released on the third day, would be paid off, get his travel slips.

He spent the afternoon writing letters. He wrote

to every one he could think of at home, telling them to be on the lookout for him. He wrote to a real estate firm telling them he would be in the market for an apartment; he accepted the offer of Hodges and Smith with a guarded appreciation.

The morrow finally came. After an endless wait in a crowded office, where typewriters banged and there was a constant surging in and out, apparently to no purpose, Brawn heard his name called and then was handed a sheaf of papers all neatly piled together. The captain at the desk gave him a little lecture on the procedure he would have to follow—he spoke it as if it might have been Masonic ritual—and then Brawn found himself out in the sunlight, wondering what to do next.

There was clearance to be obtained at the Quartermaster Depot and at the Ordnance Depot. He had to get receipts from his Mess Officer. For a time it looked as though he could not possibly get it all attended to that day, but throughout all the irritating delays came the uplifting anticipation of freedom and homegoing, and he held his patience on its leash and kept doggedly at the business. At retreat he was half way across the drill grounds behind Headquarters on his way to his room, and he had to stand there in salute until the last strains of the bugle died away. He stripped off his clothes, took a long, luxurious shower, and then dressed for dinner. He heard the various comments of his fellow officers on his leaving. They seemed vaguely pleasant. He sat, that evening, on the rough little steps of the quarters and watched the stars come out, watched the sky above the brown stretch of plain soften and deepen with the plain fad-

ing into shadow and reaching into void, mile upon mile to the eastward. A sense of complacency came over his being. He had finished his job and was ready to start for himself. And Phyllida—the idea of her, rather—seemed to hover uncertainly about the glamorous prospect, she herself the most glamorous thing in the whole picture, vague, uncertain, and alluring. He trembled slightly at the thought.

The next morning found him early in line. He filed up the stairs to the vast, empty room where the Medical Discharge Board was sitting. He was told to strip off his clothes, which he did with feverish rapidity. Ahead of him stretched a line of naked men, with here and there a brown or black skin. At various intervals a "medic" would take his respective toll. Brawn folded his arms and grasped his sides, instinctively nervous, and slowly the line moved along. The boards felt rough and splintery to his bare feet. He looked around to assure himself where he had left his clothes so that he might more easily find them when they had finished with him.

An officer was standing before him with a stethoscope. He was a first lieutenant and looked like a boy. The officer placed the bell-shaped end of the stethoscope against his chest and began moving it slowly about. "In, out, and cough," he said. Then he made Brawn stoop over, letting his arms hang loosely while he pushed the thing across Brawn's back. Finally he was through. He looked into Brawn's eyes rather queerly. He took a pencil and marked a blue cross mark on Brawn's chest—on the right side, just below the clavicle. He started to speak. His voice burred and he cleared his throat. "Report to



Captain Finley," he said. "Over there." He pointed across the room.

Brawn felt a curious, weak, chilly little feeling in his stomach. "Don't I go through with the rest of them?"

"No. Just drop out. Report to Captain Finley." And then the lieutenant turned to the next man.

Brawn slowly walked across the room to the desk indicated. Over in a corner by a window three officers were standing, watching something outdoors. Brawn paused before the desk and stood there waiting, uncertain just what to do. His mind was in a blurr. Directly one of the officers spied him and came toward him. He saw the mark on Brawn's chest, just as Brawn spoke, and he went to the desk and opened the drawer. "Are you Captain Finley?" said Brawn in a dry voice. The man did not answer him at once but drew forth a stethoscope and came round the desk toward Brawn, testing the joint of the rubber tube with the metal ear piece. "That's my name," he replied brightly.

There came a repetition of what Brawn had been through before. "In, out, and cough," said Captain Finley. Directly he paused and with the receiver still cupped against Brawn's chest, called over his shoulder, "Oh, Whittemore! Come here, will you?"

Brawn felt curiously like a trapped animal. A tall lieutenant with a brown Van Dyke beard and thick red lips came and looked at him intently in the eyes.

"Listen to this one," said Captain Finley.

"In, out, and cough," said Lieutenant Whittemore. Brawn went through the routine again. It was getting tiresome.



Suddenly Whittemore looked up at him and then at the captain. And then he smiled. "Yep," he said. "Unmistakable."

The three stood there silently for a moment and the breeze from the open window came creeping across the floor about Brawn's bare legs. Something was holding him rigid and stiff, just as though he were at attention, and a dry little tickling arose in his throat and his head went round and round. After a while he spoke:

"What's the matter?"

The two officers looked at him. Whittemore looked at the captain and the captain lowered his eyes. Suddenly he looked up at Brawn again and into his eyes. "You've got t. b.," he said briskly. "Where are your papers?"

Brawn handed them over to him mechanically and the captain sat down at the desk. "Lieutenant?—Huh! Tough luck, old man." He was smiling up again at Brawn and holding out the papers.

"Shall I—shall I get back in line now—and go on with the rest of it?" Brawn hardly recognized the voice as his own.

The captain shook his head. "Not now. We've something else for you to do. Go get on your clothes and come back here when you do." He turned again to Whittemore and then the two of them went over to the window and were staring out into the area again.

Brawn walked over to the chair where his clothes were piled. Slowly he pulled them on. His hands and feet were cold—cold—as though no blood were reaching that far. He laced his shoes. He slipped his tie through his collar and knotted it. And then

he put on his hat, smoothing back his hair as he always did when he put on his hat. The line of naked figures was filing slowly past him, some nervous, some smiling, some slapping their sides, and in the centre of the ring the little lieutenant with his stethoscope, stooping over, listening.

Brawn walked slowly over to Captain Finley's desk. The officers were still watching that something out in the area. Brawn stood and waited. He had no feeling unless it might be that of falling—falling interminably through sleazy blue distances. The sunlight was bright and warm on the yellow wall of the barracks opposite. He heard the shouts of a teamster and he walked slowly over to the window where the "medics" were gathered, fingering at his trouser pockets. He could see out of the window. He could see a teamster, a raw, new teamster, trying to back his mules and a heavy truck up to the warehouse door opposite! He was standing on the footboard of the seat and swinging a long whip about his head and trying to reach the mules' withers with it. He seemed perilously perched and his anxiety was laughable. The wagon was stalled against a stone and could not move backward. Captain Finley looked up and caught sight of Brawn, and came walking toward him. "Just a minute, Lieutenant."

Brawn watched his face—it was absurdly solemn—with the bright glare of the sunlight on the yellow wall behind it. And then he laughed.

"All set, Captain," he said. "Where do we go from here?"



BOOK II  
ARMAGEDDON





## CHAPTER XIV

**A**N AMBULANCE went poking its way across the plain, pausing every now and then as if to make sure of its footage, then darting forward. It weaved along, a vague haphazard path—progressing gingerly. As far as the eye could reach was a flat tableland all graying brown and with hardly a bit of colour save the splotch of dirty mauve that was a rancher's cottage plumped squarely in the midst of a gray nothing. Not a tree, not a blade of grass had the hardihood to live in this plain and from the northwestward clouds were scudding, occasionally dipping low with their caps full of wind that carried a few furtive splashes of rain and drove the tumble weed before them in crazy wheeling balls. The air was chill and the sky, even when it dipped with its dirty curling mists, had a cold aloofness and would draw away again as if scorning the earth and its feeble human litter. *Bump ump ump ump*, went the ambulance, *bump ump ump bump bump*. "My God, driver," called a voice. "Have a heart, won't you? You'll jerk the works out of us." The voice came from a man in a long officer's overcoat buttoned close up under his chin. He had his hands shoved deep in his pockets and sat hunched forward slightly, staring at the blank drab curtain that was the side of his conveyance. "I hadn't much the matter with me when I got in this

damn bus, but there's no telling what this guy has jarred loose now." This last he added to a companion who sat across the narrow aisleway, facing him in a corresponding attitude and a bit nearer the door. "Wonder why they haven't filled up these shell holes?"

The driver caught a look over his shoulder, started to speak, then leaned over to the left and discharged a tremendous amber deluge out upon the landscape.

"Dey ain't built no road. Why should dey? We ain't goin' nowhere—on'y to a hospittle."

*Bump ump ump bump*, went the ambulance.

The first officer glanced over at his companion. Sympathetically each smiled. This cryptic friendliness of the driver's implied many things: an assumption that sickness automatically was a general leveller to a common rank of suffering; an inference that all who wore the uniform were leagued against a callous public and a venal administration somewhere. "Where are you from, Lieutenant?" and then as the other man seemed taken by surprise, "I'm Captain Mellon—Coast Artillery—Presidio."

They reached out across the aisle and shook hands. "I'm from Camp Travis—Eighty-fifth Infantry—My name's Brawn."

This sufficed for some minutes.

After a time: "Much the matter with you?" from the captain. He coughed slightly, a short, hard, dry cough.

"Not that I know of," replied Brawn. "Don't know that there's anything—for sure."

"Same here."

Silence for a long while.

The captain coughed again. "Bronchitis," he es-

sayed, and then was silent again—thoughtful and reflecting. “Sure’d like to get home—back to my business. It’s on the boom now. Contractin’, pavin’. Damn fools! Losin’ about fifty dollars a day.”

Brawn speculated on the problem of the captain. “Yeah,” he said. “It is tough. I know what it is.” Suddenly he raised his head and addressed the opposite curtain. “But I suppose they have to be careful. They’ve got to be sure and turn us back to the community in the same shape they took us.” The idea was forming in his head as he went along and he was a bit astonished at his facility. “They’ve rented us—our bodies—our lives—from ourselves. Now they’re through with us and they have to pay for whatever damage results. Not like a truck or something like that. They can junk stuff like that when they’re through. But with a man it’s different.”

The captain looked up from his collar and stared at Brawn. Slowly his lower jaw dropped and his eyelids grew heavy. “Yeah,” he said. “Thirty dollars a month!—Helluva damage!”

“How do you mean?” asked Brawn.

“That’s what they’ll pay you—if you’re totally disabled.”

Silence descended again upon the interior of the ambulance, a silence that was in some strange manner infected with bitterness. They had dropped back into intermediate speed and the grinding noise of the gear was harsh and irritating. They crept along. And behind them, pursuing them across the plain, came the gusty wind with its empty rattle, the darting clouds and fretful rain splashes, the swirling spirals of thin anemic dust and the crazy tumbleweed—rolling, rolling.



And then in some inexplicable manner the whole thing stopped: the groaning of the gears, the whistling of the wind and the *bump-ump-ump* of the body on the springs. They were still; the driver was sliding across the seat. He crawled through the narrow aperture of the curtain. "You'se wait here," he said. "Be back in a minute."

Through the dirty splash of the windshield they saw him cross in front of the car and go into a little shop at the corner of the crossroads up ahead. And beyond—Brawn felt a curious sinking, letting go as he looked—squarely athwart their path stood two tall columns of concrete, posts of a ponderous iron grille that stood yawning and open, and above it, swinging slowly back and forth in the wind, a painted sign that said: "West Gate." A sentry stood by one of the pillars, his rifle couched in the saddle of his shoulder. He was watching the car from under the brim of his hat—waiting. They had arrived.

And then the driver was coming toward them, his head bent forward slightly against the wind, his right cheek bulging, a frown of preoccupation on his face. He clambered in. There was a clank, again the grinding noise, and the car lurched forward only to come to a stop a few feet farther on. Some one came and lifted the corner of the back curtain and peered in. He looked at the captain and he looked at Brawn. And then he looked at the empty seats—thoughtfully. It was the sentry. His eyes squinted a bit to adjust to the gloom of the interior and Brawn and the captain sat with the rigid impassiveness of the soldier on inspection, simulating inorganic matter—just as though there were nothing ridiculous in the procedure.

"A-ite," grunted the sentry, jerking his free thumb over his shoulder. The curtain dropped and the car lurched forward. And in Brawn's heart kept ringing, like a tiny, insistent bell: "It's come. It's come."

They whirled along a gravelly roadway, lined by a double column of pitiful, naked little trees. The road was a red-brown gash in an interminable stretch of gray. Here and there were tufts of gray-brown weeds and some mounds of yellow dirt freshly spaded up and laid back apparently to no purpose. Across the plains, miles to the north, streaked the wind and the clouds with the tumbleweed fleeing before it—above, sky; below, plain; beside these, nothing. And then suddenly, up ahead, as they turned a slight curve, they saw a line of tall square buildings, likewise naked and bare and gray, only a little darker than the background of sky. They were drawn up in rows echeloned, and they had that sullen, sombre, impassive look of waiting for something. To Brawn they could be waiting but for one purpose, had been thus waiting throughout a bleak eternity. And directly these were slipping past, silent save for the echoing scud of the wind, with huge gray windows placed at intervals like dots on a baby's blocks, and with the earth about them all bare and yellow and dead and spewing little whirlwinds of dust and trash.

Then the echelons gave way to a disordered cluster, a semi-circle of buildings, one of them painted white and with a warm red roof. The gravel road turned into a paving of concrete that circled the central building and grass plot, wherein lifted a tall, slender flag pole. The ambulance swept round this circle about one quarter of the circumference and then came to a

stop, its brakes grinding. "Yu-up! Here ye are," said the driver and sprang from his seat to the ground.

Brawn and the captain painfully clambered out backward. They stood on the roadway waiting for further directions and as they did so the sun peeped through an unexpected rift in the sky and lighted up a white plaster structure before them in a pale and sickly glare. All about them was a curious bustle. Trucks were plunging about over to the left, churning up the soft yellow dirt into deep ruts. Gangs of men carrying spades and shovels were filing through an opening in a lattice fence between two adjacent buildings. Before them was a narrow portico protecting double doors that were constantly swinging open and shut and through these doors was revealed a long hallway down which a line of men in pale bathrobes was slowly moving to some unseen destination. Brisk chubby little officers with the insignia of the medical corps on their collars went to and fro, their eyes bent thoughtfully on the ground. There seemed a plethora of majors; Brawn counted five as he stood there waiting. Beyond the building directly before them stretched another, dirty gray in colour and apparently miles long, and from the doors along its length there was a constant traffic of orderlies in white coats, wheeling little dump carts and provision wagons. Their own driver was busy talking to a soldier in a white coat who leaned from a window a few yards away, and they both seemed amused at something. "These corps men're mostly all Conscientious Objectors," said Captain Mellon. "No discipline at all."

They stood there idly and watched the life of the



post surge past them. Through the door they could see that pale line pressing slowly on. There seemed no end to the line. There came the warning whir of an automobile and they stepped a little to one side as a large lavender-coloured shape lumbered past. It stopped, then backed up in a curve to a small basement doorway in the main building over to their right. The driver jumped down. The door opened and three orderlies came out and stood waiting for a minute, blinking, hatless in the pale sunshine. Then a long yellow box poked its nose out the door and the three orderlies sprang forward and took hold. Staggering under the weight and assisted by the driver they carried the box forward and laid it on the pavement just outside the building. Another box was poking its nose out and this they treated in the same manner, laying it on the pavement beside the other. Came a third. In grasping the corner of this third box, one of the orderlies stumbled and the box nearly fell to the pavement, but the orderly recovered it. They laid it beside the other two and the men then straightened up and looked about them, wiping their foreheads. The driver produced a book from his coat and opened it. He handed it with a pencil to one of the orderlies who wrote something in it and then handed it back, punching the driver in the ribs with the pencil.

Captain Mellon turned to Brawn. There was a wide grin on his face. "Some plant," he said. "Shipping room, must be. Feed 'em in there"—pointing to the long line of bathrobed men—"Load 'em out there. Wonder what the output is?"

Brawn felt a little sick at his stomach. "Come on,



you two," called the ambulance driver. He led the way up the steps, down the hallway past the line of men to a small room tucked in a corner under a stairs. There was a sergeant bent over a table in the centre of the room and he was busy writing. The driver laid a bulging envelope on the table. "Two more, Sergeant. Here's the charts." Then he left them. The sergeant looked up, caught sight of the braid on their sleeves and hitched up a little straighter in his chair. "Just sit down there a minute, Captain—Lieutenant," he said politely.

They did so and as they waited there came to their ears a murmurous sound, a sound of many feet shuffling along, a sound of doors distantly slamming, the hum of voices and the harsh, chattering bark of a truck passing an open window. Directly the sergeant pushed a button and a bell rang in the distance. An orderly appeared at the door to the hall. "Take these er—a——"

They followed the orderly down the hall and out again into the paved square. The hearse was just leaving as they passed. Behind them they could hear that shuffling of feet, that confused hum of voices in restraint. Across the ground they went to a long cement incline with iron railings that ran upward in a gentle slope to a platform about fifteen or twenty feet high on the face of the very long building. From this platform the incline split and branched out in two arms running upward and parallel with the building to a covered porch on either side. All along the building in either direction were these porches at regular intervals, and above the concrete railings around them Brawn caught sight of an occasional head. Leading

from the central platform into the building was a double door to which the orderly conducted them, and as it swung open a gust of warm air surged down the passage toward them, heavy with the odour of formalin and carbolic acid, subtly blended. They climbed a short flight of stairs and came to a small office with glass partitions and an open glass door.

"Wait here," the orderly said to the captain. "You come this way," to Brawn. And the latter followed him down a dim hallway flanked by interminable doors, half glass and heavily curtained and with cards displaying the name of the occupant pasted to the wall by each door with adhesive tape. Brawn had an indistinct impression that he was passing rooms—rooms wherein other human beings were housed. Far down the passage he could see figures moving along, crossing the hall from one side to the other and disappearing. And there was that same vague hush, that suggestion of feet shuffling along. Never had there been stranger hostelry; never stranger hospitality. Years and years before when he was a very little boy he had had a toy called a roller coaster down which one rolled marbles. The marbles would roll down a runway around corners and through little tunnels until they spilled out into a round basin with slots or sockets placed about at random and with numbers opposite the slots. There they would whirl about for a moment and then settle slowly into a slot. It was all quite incidental and delightfully impersonal. He was a marble. He had been pushed down the runway. He was rolling about on the basin. And now he was stopping before his slot. The orderly was opening the door. Funny what fool things the human mind will occupy itself with

"Here y'are," said the orderly. "Yer baggage'll come up in about an hour."

Brawn looked at his watch. It was four o'clock. Then he looked about the room. It was quite empty, not a thing within its four yellow plaster walls. Facing him was a window and a pair of double glass doors that led to a porch. Through the doors he could see a bed, made up and unoccupied, and a chair and a small bedside table. He walked slowly to the door and peered out. There was his porch. Over to the right of it was another bed. He could see that there was some one in it. Two men shared one porch, it was apparent. Above the porch railing was the gray line of roof of a building near by, and above that gray line of roof a blank patch of gray sky. Brawn felt as though he had been dropped down out of the sky into nowhere, a dull, empty gray void.

The door opened and a plump, red-faced nurse came briskly in.

"Here are your pajamas and a bathrobe and some slippers.—And haven't you any chair?—Well, I'll have one sent in." She reached out the clothing and Brawn took it dumbly. "Just shuck off your clothes and jump into these pajamas.—Are the slippers too big, d'you think?"

"But why should I do that?" protested Brawn. "I'm not sick."

The nurse raised her eyebrows and gave a slight shrug of her shoulders. "You don't know," she said. "We'll see about that later.—Now be a good boy and do as I tell you."

She did not seem to look at him directly. She did not seem to regard him any more than the four bare walls.



He thought perhaps she meant to stay—to see that he did her bidding. With his free right hand he slowly began to unbutton his blouse. And then she turned and left the room.

In another minute an orderly came in with a chair and Brawn proceeded with his undressing. When he had got into his pajamas and slippers, he turned, with his hand on the door knob, and looked back. The chair with the pile of his clothes on it looked quite forlorn, there in the centre of the empty room. He opened the door and stepped out upon the porch, still feeling that he was venturing. But the wind came sweeping about his bare ankles and around his shoulders and he made haste to kick off his slippers and jump into the bed. Was there ever a madder thing to do? For a moment he lay quite breathless, staring at the ceiling, his mind reeling round and round in a giddy whirl. What had he got himself into?

“You’re sure getting off to a flying start,” said a voice and then he remembered that he had a neighbour and turned his head. A boy with a bright red face was lying in the bed across the porch from him and grinning pleasantly. “Most of ’em take it by degrees,” said the boy. “You must want to get it over and done with.”

Brawn smiled wanly. “I reckon I do.”

He was not so very neighbourly so his companion said no more. And Brawn lay—flat on his back, gazing off into the gray patch of sky above the roof, and by and by a dull, senseless calm began to settle down upon him. He no longer cared.

After a long, long time he heard the door open behind him and he turned his head and looked around.



Approaching him was a radiant young person in a sky-blue dress and white apron and with a detached and foolish-looking little cap on her head. She had a bundle of books under her arm and a tablet and pencil in her hand. She came and stood beside Brawn's bed; for a moment he thought she was a child, she was so pink and chubby and trustful-looking with her staring brown eyes and her tight little mouth.

"And what can I put you down for?" she said, wiggling her pencil at him and cocking one eyebrow.

Brawn looked puzzled.

"Oh," she said, flushing. "You're another one, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Brawn. "I suppose I am."

"Well. That makes no difference anyway. What are you going to take?"

"I don't know if you're kidding me or not, but if it's just the same to you I'll take mine straight and get it over with." He shifted a little in his bed and partly turned on his side the better to see her.

She frowned. "Oh, dear! You're a new one, aren't you? I suppose I'll have to tell you all about it."

"Yes," said Brawn, "I suppose you will."

But she paid no attention to his interruption. "Well, you see, I'm teaching all these boys"—an expansive gesture including all the sleeping porches—"everything." She paused and looked at him with mock fierceness.

"What a talented young person you must be," said Brawn.

"So that when you get out, you can go into most any sort of work—only I just have the academic work; the others teach you the rest."

Brawn was silent—"When you get out"—when?

She was watching his face. Suddenly she seemed satisfied. "I've spelling and arithmetic and algebra—a little. And I've a wee tiny course in Masterpieces—painting and sculpture, you know—tell you how to appreciate them. And"—she paused—"next week I'll have a new one. —Just as soon as we get the books." Her voice was high and throaty like a child's and she had a nervous little way of switching her skirt.

"Won't you sit down?" said Brawn.

"No, thank you. It's a course in political economy. I don't know whose text. But it ought to prove very useful.— You're a business man, aren't you—or have been?"

"Yes," said Brawn, watching her eyes that went roaming about the ceiling and the porch and the sky and the porches beyond, as restless as humming birds. "You may put me down for that."

"All right," she agreed cheerfully. "That'll be fine. I'm so glad and I'll let you know soon's the books come. What is the name, please?"

He told her and watched her write it down on her tablet.

"Well, good-bye.—Oh, hello, Lieutenant Cole!" She stepped across the porch to the other bed.

Brawn lay and looked at the ceiling. He barely heard her as she left the porch some minutes later.

He must have slept, a short breathless little nap, for he suddenly realized that an orderly was standing by his bedside with a tray on which was food. He straightened in his bed, allowed the orderly to put the tray across his knees. On the plate there was a small

oval of meat. He dug into it with his fork and nibbled a bite. It was discouraging—a slab of goose liver or something much like it. There was a pat of mashed potatoes, moist and cool. On another little plate were two thin slices of dry bread cut triangular shape and a small piece of butter—also a pickle, very sour and shrivelled. In a small porcelain cup without a handle was some milk. The cup was chipped about the edge so that it grated on his lip. And just inside the brim was a thin ring of scummy dirt. The milk tasted flat. Brawn sighed and then he pushed the stuff from him. After a while the orderly came and took away the tray. “Want any more milk?” he asked. He did not notice that the cup was still half full.

Slowly the minutes passed and after a while the gray patch above the roof line began to grow darker. Somewhere below him some one began to cough—a long, tremulous, unsatisfying cough. Brawn shivered and bit his lip. The plant was operating. The raw material was feeding through. He tried not to listen. But despite himself he strained his ears—to hear better. And then all along that unknown, unseen area there came a murmurous sound, as of countless throats clearing themselves, and a rustling, a suggestive movement. Suddenly he realized that he had been hearing it all along, only now as night fell, bringing the night air, cold and penetrating and sharp, there seemed to rise a more insistent note—more insistent notes—until finally there came beating against his ears a babel of racking sound, staccato, punctuated by breathless silences, and every now and then a low groan.

Gradually the sun slipped away from the world, leaving it only a little grayer, and across the sky there

passed a line of tenuous cloud shapes, with misty, writhing outlines. Silently they chased themselves across the patch before him, silently fleeing. And Brawn threw his arm up over his head and turned on his side, closing his eyes.



## CHAPTER XV

**Y**OU don't want to let those stiff's get your agate. —What they don't know would fill a book." It was Lieutenant Cole speaking, lying with his cheek propped in his palm, the covers drawn up carelessly about his shoulders.

Brawn laughed nervously. "Oh, I don't. After all it's just what one man thinks. Or rather guesses. It's only guess work. I had an uncle years ago that the doctors told would live only six weeks——"

"Sure," said Cole. "And don't give up all the joy in life. Take it from me, I don't. They don't watch this place much after night and—there's a good way out." He waved his hand at the concrete runway which joined on to his side of the porch. A faint smile hovered about his lips. "Been to town any?"

"No," said Brawn. "Not yet."

"Live town. Lots of janes help separate you from your money. I had one—let's see—week ago last Saturday night. Went to a joint out north there some where—back in a grove of trees. Had a lot of curtained booths and a slick dance floor with the jazziest orchestra you ever heard. Only trouble was this jane didn't want to come home. I pretty near blew a fuse."

"Didn't dance, did you?"

"Manicure.—Huh? Oh yes. Little bit. 'S good for you. Help you digest this damn grub."

They were silent. Down the hall past their door sounded the muffled thud of rubber heels. Somewhere off in the distance some one was washing pans; the slamming and crashing of them was detached, localized in the silence. Along the pavement below, a man's voice was singing, "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles." They could hear the sharp crack of his heels on the walk.

Cole laughed. "Been classified yet?"

"No." And then after a minute or so: "How do you mean classified?"

"Oh, 'cording to your chances.—Good, fair, poor." He wrinkled up his forehead and scratched his head. "Don't know where I come in. Don't think the doc knows himself. He ought to use a punch-board—put our names on a punch board. Whatever he punches out that's what we get."

"How do you mean, 'Good, fair and poor'?" said Brawn.

"That's your chance—to get well. Good, fair, poor! —Well, I should worry." The flush on his face was mounting into his hair and his eyes were very bright. He was fingering the edge of the white counterpane. "They're rating them now. Started up west end of Upper West. For insurance, you know."

Brawn was watching a huge bluebottle fly that was crawling along the porch railing toward an empty milk cup. The fly crawled up the steep side of the cup and over the beaded rim. There it paused as if to peer down into the crater and then disappeared over the edge. Brawn wondered if eventually they meant to screen the place.

Cole chuckled. "There's one guy pulled a good one

on the Board, they tell me—yesterday. They were arguin' like hell in the next room whether to give him total permanent or not.—That's to give him his insurance, you know," he added. "Seems as though you have to have all five lobes or cavities or something. Well," he went on, "as they were arguin' whether or not this guy—he was a Lieutenant Groome, I believe—whether this Lieutenant was totally and permanently disabled, damn if he didn't die on 'em—while they were out of the room in the next room talking about his case! One of the doctors came walking back into his room: 'Well, Lieutenant,' he says, 'we've decided to give it to you.' The guy was dead. Flipped a ruby they say. Had guts enough not to holler out. Either that, or he was too far gone."—Cole chuckled again. "First time the board ever guessed right they say."

Brawn pulled the covers up close under his chin and watched the little patch of fleecy white clouds go drifting past across his blue space. The blue space was very blue. The scullery man had finished washing his pans; the feet in the hallway had gone beyond hearing.

"Know what your rating is yet?" Cole was asking him.

"No," said Brawn. "Haven't been examined yet."

"Don't let 'em put anything over on you. Sicker you are the more they'll give you. Tell 'em you're sick as hell.—Might as well collect that fifty-seven fifty a month as let 'em pay it to some dizzy clerk in the War Risk Bureau."

"I don't think there's much the matter with me," said Brawn.

"Mightn't be now. Just wait till you've been here a while," said Cole. . . .

The morning passed slowly. At eleven o'clock, Captain Parker, the ward surgeon, came out on their porch, a black cloth-covered blank-book in his hand. "Let's see," he said. "There's—I haven't examined you yet, have I?" to Brawn. "This is—room thirty-three, isn't it?—Twenty-nine, thirty-one—thirty-three.—Brown?—No, Brawn, isn't it? Brawn—J. O."

"Yes," said Brawn feeling a tenseness about his stomach.

"Well. Just slip on your bathrobe and come with me, Lieutenant.—You're feeling well enough to, aren't you?"

"Surely," replied Brawn quickly. "There's nothing the matter with me, Captain. Never felt better in my life."

The captain was unimpressed. "Well, just slip on your bathrobe. It's a bit chilly in the hall. We'll go down to the office. It's quieter there."

Down the hall they went, Brawn like a gray, ghostly, gliding shadow after the fat, dumpy figure in uniform. They turned in the little glass-partitioned office, and the captain closed the door and pulled down the blinds. "Take off your shirt."

There followed a repetition of the procedure to which Brawn had become so accustomed, the captain every now and then pausing to whistle a few bars of an unintelligible tune, under his breath. He paused. Then he began to cluck softly with his tongue against his palate. He sprang to his feet and walked over to the glass cabinet in the corner. He rummaged about on the bottom shelf and pulled out a pad of charts—long narrow forms. He sat down at the desk and laid the pad before him and then looked up at the wall.



"How'm I getting on, Captain?" said Brawn. "Pretty good?"

"Mmmm," replied the captain, musingly. He stooped over and began to make some little marks on the chart. "Cough much?"

"None at all.—I tell you, Captain, I never felt better in my life. Think I've been getting stronger just lying there in that fine air."—The captain referred to his blank book.—"Reckon I can be getting out now in a few days? I've some business I'd like to be attending to in town. I've been in eight days now."

To all intents the captain had not heard him. Then he smiled and stood up again. His face was full and round and cheerful, not much expression in the deep-set eyes. "Better stick a bit close for a while yet. You're still running a little temp."

"But," exclaimed Brawn, aghast, "I've never——" He paused. "Why, I feel like a million dollars," he finished in a low, protesting tone.

"I see you're from Louisville."

"Yes," said Brawn, dully.

"I lived in Louisville," the captain went on brightly. "Went to the medical college there. Remember it? First and Chestnut?"

Brawn was not interested in the medical college at First and Chestnut. He was running a temp. "Yes," he said. "I went to the High School.—Building just next door."

The captain sucked at an offending tooth. "We might have been there at the same time.—It's funny, isn't it?"

Brawn made no reply. His mind was far away from the things of the past. Time was sweeping forward

with relentless haste. Then he realized that he was not being sociable. "You didn't practise in Louisville, did you, Captain?"

"No. I went to Indianapolis."

So he was running a temp. "I knew a Doctor Wells in Indianapolis. In fact I trained there—for the army. He lived somewhere on State Street—big frame house—on a corner. Went there to dinner one Sunday during Camp.—You didn't happen to know him, did you?"

"No."

"And then there was a Doctor Peabody," went on Brawn—it would be better to be friendly; he might be able to work him for a pass later on. "Did you happen to know him?"

"No," said the Captain slowly. "I a—— as a matter of fact, I did not follow medicine when I went to Indianapolis. I was with the Northern Mutual Life Insurance Company there for six years."

"Oh, I see," said Brawn. "Medical Board?"

"No," He paused for a long time. Then he closed the book and shoved it in a drawer of the desk. "I was on the street."

Brawn was slipping into his bathrobe. Somehow he felt that he had not been fortunate in his efforts to be chummy.

"Well," said Captain Parker, "you'd better run along now and get back to bed.—Stick pretty close, Lieutenant. You've got quite a lot of trouble, there, on the right side."

Brawn walked slowly down the hall and into his room. . . .

He struggled through the noon meal in a kind of daze. There were strawberries. Brawn had six of

them for his ration—ancient, rubbery, flavourless things they were, not quite ripe, in spots rather green. There were carrots and corn bread, dry and crumbly and yellow and coarse, and a small slab of overdone roast beef fringed about with festoons of fat and gristle, and the eternal porcelain cup of chalky milk. So he was not going to get out of it so soon after all! Perhaps he would be spending years on that porch, in that very bed. There was no telling about anything.—And the captain had sold insurance on the streets of Indianapolis.—How hard was it, he wondered, to diagnose a chest? The orderly came and took the tray away and Brawn sank back in his pillows again. He closed his eyes and deliberately tried to sleep. He imagined he was in Kentucky—in May. It was the river front that came to his mental eye. It was gusty and dry and the sunlight lay in uncertain, pale yellow patches on the cobbles. Below him, a distance away, lapped the edges of the river, yellow and muddy and littered with trash and scum just where the water touched the land. They were unloading a river steamer. Strings of Negro roustabouts were filing up and down the gang-plank that somehow did not quite reach the bank. The Negroes would come up out of the hold with tremendous burdens on their heads and shoulders; one staggered under a grand piano, another carried a hogshead of tobacco, another held securely over his head the kicking and struggling body of a steer. Down the gang-plank they would come in Indian file, reach the end, and throw their burdens off their shoulders into the water where they sank like stones and disappeared. Then the Negroes would turn about and file back up the gang-plank into the boat again. They



were all very quiet, very sober about it. Then a whistle blew—there was no sound of a whistle, only the picture of one blowing: white steam rising in a cloud and the certainty of sound without its perception—the gang-plank rose and stood pointing off into the sky. The boat began to move. There was an immediate scurrying of forms on the lower deck and Brawn could see the boat beginning to settle; the yellow water was rising slowly so that it came to the edge of the deck like water brimming in a glass. And then the boat listed to one side and the captain of the boat came and told Brawn not to be afraid, that he had sold insurance on the street for six years and could very easily save the boat and Brawn too. Brawn did not hear him but that was what he said. And then the water came over. “Are you going to sleep your life away?” said a voice, and he looked up and saw Miss Dorothy Peck standing by his bed with a bright yellow book in her hand.

“It’s come,” said Miss Dorothy Peck.

Brawn blinked. At first he could not think what it was she meant.

She pulled up a chair and sat down by the bed. The little tendrils of soft golden hair curled about the facing of her cap, and her cheek, as she gazed down at the book in her lap, was a rich, creamy golden texture, while underneath, the pulsing suggestion of bright red blood surged out in a ruddy flush at her temples and in the delicate convolutions of her ears. “Do you know anything about economy, Lieutenant Brawn?”

He was watching the crimson ebb and flow. “I’ve never practised it.—Don’t know that I do.”

She blushed, bit her lip and frowned. “Let’s try



not be frivolous," she said. "Economy, rather Political Economy in particular, is the husbanding of any kind of er a—resources, material or mental"—she paused, looked thoughtful, opened the book, shut it again leaving her thumb in the place where she had opened it—"warlike or peaceful." Then she reflected on the scope of the definition as she gazed off at the opposite roof. "By resources I suppose he means not only material things but labour and electricity—that isn't material—and water power and—and credit. Credit is the great thing in business. Let's get the full idea of what he means by resources," she urged.

"I know," murmured Brawn. "Resources means capacity, too. You've got to have 'em to live here." He waved his hand to include the confines of the sleeping porch.

"Let's stick to the discussion of the text.—What businesses have you been in, Lieutenant Brawn?"

Brawn considered. "Well, I sold pigs once, but I didn't make much money at it. The pigs I raised myself.—And then later on I took subscriptions to magazines and I sold stamps, for collections. And then the last business I was in I sold building lots, in a subdivision. But the sub-division did not pan out very well. They built a glue factory on one edge of it."

Miss Dorothy Peck was puzzled. She did not seem to know just how to proceed: Brawn was so very grave. "Well," she exclaimed, then paused, and then opened the book again and began to read in it. The breeze came and twitched idly at her skirts and twisted the little tendrils of her hair. Directly she looked up. She pursed her lips. "What—what do you suppose—wealth is?"

Brawn smiled a shadowy smile. "I've—not—the slightest—idea."

She sprang to her feet, her face crimson. "Listen, Lieutenant Brawn. We Re-Aides are here to help you. This is serious business and we're not just to entertain you men. You needn't think I'm going around just to have some conversation with a lot of unappreciative boys." She emphasized the word "boys." "You *must* try and be serious. Otherwise there'd be no use in my staying away from home and my work just for something trivial." She looked at him unsteadily and her eyes were dewy. "I'm not so certain of this subject myself. I have to work hard to prepare for these lessons and you ought not to——"

"I'm sorry," said Brawn.

She relented a little and returned to the book. This time she read aloud from it frankly: "External resources are desired as a means of living or as a means of well-being; in either case as a means of fulfilling human ends, and satisfying human wants.—Collectively, they are his wealth——" She paused and thought. "Do you get the idea of that?"

Brawn murmured acquiescence.

She was silent for a long time; he thought she had mentally drifted from the ponderous tome. "What do you do—at home?" he ventured at length.

She seemed a bit surprised but not offended. "Why," she said. "I help my father."

"And what does your father do?" Brawn persisted.

"He runs a general store," said Dorothy Peck, "back home."

"Where is back home?"

She flushed. She flushed easily like sunshine on a shell. She was always flushing. "Iola, Nebraska.—It's a little place."

"That sounds pretty good to me," said Brawn.

Economy and wealth were forgotten in the face of more important things. The air that came lapping about the corner of the porch grew balmier and balmier and the sun sank in the west so that there was a crimson glare on the concrete pillar at the porch corner. Brawn was telling Dorothy Peck how "the bunch" used to motor to Lexington every Saturday afternoon the spring of 1909. She sat listening, smiling. Suddenly she sprang up. She looked at her watch. "Oh!" she said. "This is terrible. I'll have to run, run, run.—Well," she motioned at him with her pencil, "to-morrow we'll go on. I'll leave the book here. And you owe me a dollar and thirty-five cents."

"To-morrow I'll pay you," said Brawn.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

He watched the swing of her starched blue skirt as she left the porch. He heard her open the door to the hall, heard a slight bustling confusion and then voices. There came a hum and a rustling and then four men in pajamas and bathrobes burst out on to the porch. The leader, a slender man with a mop of graying hair and gold-rimmed spectacles and a very red thin face came forward, holding out his hand.

"My name is Bledsoe, Lieutenant," he said, "Major Bledsoe. And this is Lieutenant Scholtz, Lieutenant Benning, and Captain Menowski." Three men with trailing bathrobes and with bare throats and long



dangling wrists came forward and shook hands. "Want a little game, or do you play?" went on the major. "Four's no game at all. We're looking for a fifth.—Just a little light game."

"I don't know," Brawn hesitated. "I'm not much good."

"So much the better," interrupted the major. "I'm looking for somebody else for these birds to pick on. They cleaned me last night." Brawn noticed the restlessness of his eyes as he stood there looking about. "Where's Cole?"

"Don't know. He hasn't been here all afternoon. Don't know where he is." He raised up in bed, slipped out his feet, and fished about for his slippers.

"We'll just go down to my room, if you don't mind," explained the major. "It's quieter there. We're not so apt to be disturbed."

Silently they filed out of the room into the hall. It was deserted. The major paused just outside the door. "Gotta keep an eye on that man Cole," he laughed. "Heller with the ladies.—How does he do it, do you know?—Wish I had his system."

"Yes?" said Brawn.

They passed the little office, furtively but without detection. At the extreme end of the hall they came to the major's room and filed in silently and mysteriously. The major's room was no different from any other room, except that in the centre there was a card table and in one corner there lay a disordered pile of luggage and boxes.

Chairs were quickly got and a deck of cards and chips produced from somewhere in the midst of the junk pile in the corner. And in a few minutes the



game was in full swing. Only the conversation was restrained and the chips made no sound on the cloth-covered table top. Brawn felt himself getting tremendously interested. Just to be able to talk to other men on any other subject than health was very stimulating, very satisfying. There was a warm fellowship in the way the other four chaffed each other. They might well have been all of the same rank. Brawn began to lose. He did not care; it was enough just to get his mind off himself at any price. He bought his third stack of chips. And then the orderly brought in a tray of supper and Brawn rose to go. "Stay where you are, Lieutenant," interposed the major. "Kinkead!—Four trays. In here. Y'understand?—Just bring 'em in here.—Captain Menowski, Lieutenant Benning and Lieutenant Scholtz and Lieutenant Brawn.—And Kinkead!" he added winking. "Mum's the word!"

After supper they went on with the game and by and by the betting got stiffer. Brawn lost steadily. His face felt hot and his pulse was hammering. But he was enjoying himself. At nine o'clock they had the final pot with double stakes to help the loser, only Brawn did not win it. "Hard lines, Lieutenant," said the major, as Brawn signed an I. O. U. "I feel like a robber getting you into the game and reaming you this way. Guess I slipped you my jinx. Well—give you another chance before long."

Brawn laughed and slipped out the door. Down the hall he shuffled quietly. Most of the doors were dark; occasionally there would be a lighted transom. But Upper West had gone to sleep for the most part. He opened his door and switched on the light. The room

was frightfully bare. He'd had a good time. Usually he did not get much "kick" out of a poker party but somehow he had to-night. Poker showed a man up pretty average well after all. He had lost fifteen dollars but it hadn't hurt him. He had been a good loser.

Suddenly he was aware of voices, the repressed buzz of voices, monotonous and low. It came from beyond the partition, from Cole's room. He did not remember that Cole's transom had showed a light. He switched off his light, then opened the porch door, and in another minute was in his bed. If he had stayed in that next to the last pot he would have won ten dollars and that would have brought him nearer even. Well, next time he would know a little more about it. It took time to get one's hand in again. Then he realized there was no light in Cole's room, that his door was dark. And the low hum persisted, only now more broken by silences. Brawn was excited. He rose up in bed and looked around, straining to see. But there was nothing. Cole's half of the porch looked just like all the rest stretched out in a row. Besides, the sound came from the room, within.

He lay down again and wondered. And the wind came sighing down the passage, making a mournful echo, and every now and then he could hear the drip-drip of water somewhere. Well, it was none of his business. For a long time he lay silently watching the black ceiling. And the murmuring, after a while, came like a soporific and he drowsed. Later, as in a dream, he heard a door open, and a step sounded and there was a soft swishing of skirts over by the runway. He was too sleepy to open his eyes, too indifferent. Then

in a little while he heard a bed creak and then a sigh. And then a little later some one began to snore, not far away, and his floating light-headedness carried him higher and higher. Silence settled down upon Upper West.

## CHAPTER XVI

**S**LOWLY the weeks marched along. Daily the sky grew brighter. The sunlight was so hard, so perfect that it had a sort of brittleness. The air was drying up. But each day at sundown, or an hour or two before, there would come a west wind and clouds piling up from the mountains and then a sharp, vigorous shower that would leave the ground faintly steaming. In an hour it would be as dry as before. And now the plains were stretching away to the eastward all dry and golden and hard and the line where plain and sky came together was floating away, as one watched it, on a shimmer of quivering sun motes till it seemed farther off than the sky above. It was not possible to conceive of change and yet to John Brawn who stood watching it from a porch across the hall, it was as most surely waiting for something as himself.

June had come, was slipping by. Brawn leaned against the concrete railing and gazed off toward the southwest. "Your view is better here than mine, Benning. If I stretch my neck I can see the garbage enclosure of the officers' mess. And to the right of me is the morgue. Think I'll ask them to move me over on this side."

Benning looked thoughtful. Such a thing as view had not mattered much in his scheme of existence. He was an old Regular Army sergeant with a temporary



commission of lieutenant. "Dust is pretty damn bad here sometimes." He was lying flat on his back with his arms at his sides, looking straight ahead of him, his seamed and wrinkled face stern and impassionate. He could lie thus for hours with no apparent ravage to his nerves. "First time in eighteen years I've had a chance to get enough bunk fatigue," he had told the ward surgeon one day. He was making better progress than any other man in the ward.

"I don't reckon it will be worth while to change, though," continued Brawn. "I'm going to get out to an ambulant ward now in a few days."

Benning raised his eyebrows and rolled his eyes over in Brawn's direction. "What d'you want to do that for?" he protested. "Those birds never go to bed at night. It's noisy as hell, they tell me. What's the matter with this?"

"This isn't the right sort of atmosphere for any man," said Brawn. "It's depressing. In order to be well a man ought to be cheerful and no one can be cheerful in this place. By the way, Benning, have you heard when they are going to start letting us out?"

Benning showed not the slightest sign of comprehension.

"When they're going to give us our discharge?" Brawn continued in explanation.

Benning flushed and raised on his elbow. "Give us our discharge?" He repeated angrily. "I'd like to see 'em. I've only got eighteen months to go before I get retirement.—Like hell they will. Why," he went on, his voice rising, "I've served eighteen years and six months next Friday and if they discharge me now, all

that time will be wasted. I can't re-enlist again. Not in this condition I can't.—I never wanted this damn temporary commission anyway."

"I didn't mean discharge all of us," Brawn hastened to explain. "Only those of us who want to get out. Get discharged on application."

"What damn fool'd want to do that?" grumbled Benning lying back upon his pillow.

"Well, some of us who have a business to go back to. Some of us who are running into debt on our officers' pay. Got to make more. Living's gone up, you know, since the war. One sixty-six doesn't reach round a very big family."

Benning grunted. "Better leave well enough alone. Go back east and you'll be bumpin' off some of these days.—'S for me, they can keep me here forty years if they want to. They got me in this fix; now they can get me out." There was no lusting for position or power in Benning's heart. Perfection had moved ahead of him in his career, by just one rank.

"Oh, I don't mean just now. Later on I hope to go back."

Benning grunted again. Then the door opened and Captain Parker stepped out on to the porch. He looked quizzically at Brawn. Brawn had been imagining that Parker was holding something against him.

"What's the big idea, Lieutenant?" Parker said to Brawn. "Seems to me there's a rest hour in this ward from nine o'clock to eleven, isn't there?"

"I just came across the hall to borrow a book, Captain. My legs get stiff lying in one position all day long."

"They'll get stiffer than that if you don't take care of yourself. Better run along now.—How are you this morning, Benning?"

Brawn slowly turned from the porch railing and shuffled across the floor through Benning's dressing room and out into the hall. He forgot the book.

Back on his own porch he encountered Cole placidly peeling an orange. "That man Parker's an everlasting pest," said Brawn. "Gets one idea and works it till it's ragged. 'Better go to bed,' is all he knows. Ought to give us something to eat for a change. That might do as much good as going to bed.—I'll say this for him: he is consistent. He never has but one idea. Bet he sold every man in Indiana one of his life insurance policies. A man would buy anything to keep from listening to him for a lifetime." He crawled into bed.

"What's eatin' on you?" said Cole without looking up from his orange.

"I'll sure be glad to get over in E-2 where they won't be watching me every minute. This is a prison."

Cole was silent. After a while he spoke casually: "Don't know as how it helps much to get over there. You ain't safe anywhere. Old John T. B. slips up on you almost any time and whales you behind the ears when you're not lookin'. One of 'em bumped off over in E-2 this mornin'."

"What's that?"

"I say, one of the patients over in E-2 cashed in this morning.—Before they could get him back here.—Big mistake to die in an outside ward. It's not being done. You're supposed to do your dyin' here in Upper West.—We'll lose all our confidence in the place."



He chucked the peelings over the railing and began slowly to tear the orange apart. "Want a piece?"

"Who was the man? Did you hear?" Brawn had never got to the point where he could digest such discussion. His mind was suffering from malnutrition. It did not assimilate its hospital diet.

"Didn't know him," said Cole. "A captain of artillery, I believe. Name Mellon."

Brawn shivered. "Not Captain Mellon?" he protested. "Short, stocky man?—Been here about a month?"

"Don't know him. Never saw him."

"Why, he came here in the bus with me—same day. What do you know about that?" Brawn went on, slowly. The sunlight lay on the opposite roof in a bleak patch. To his nostrils came the odour of meat frying. Up to the right was a string of porches, two beds to a porch, and man after man—each waiting, lying there, waiting.

"Found him in his room, in a rocking chair," continued Cole, his mouth full of orange. "Dead as a nit. Heart went bad' they say. Never thought of looking at his heart. This is a hell of a place for a bad heart. Pflooeey! Off you go." He grinned. "Ever had your heart examined?"

"No," said Brawn.

The orderly came with Brawn's tray and set it on the railing.

"Take this stuff away," Brawn said to him.

Cole looked over. There was a curious gleam in his eyes. "Don't you do it, Kinthead. Bring it over here. —You're crazy as hell, Brawn. Good chow. Pork chops and cabbage. What more could you ask? And



here's some more of those India-rubber strawberries. Just leave the tray here, Kinhead.—But don't forget to bring me mine too. Gotta keep up my strength." He glanced once more at Brawn and then began to eat.

Brawn closed his eyes and tried to sleep. But in spite of his sincerest efforts the face of Captain Mellon would come and float about before his eyes. He could see him all humped up in the ambulance. Bronchitis!—people did not die of bronchitis often. *There was not much the matter with him.* That was what they all said. He heard Cole slip out of bed, but he did not open his eyes. Cole was probably laughing at him. It did not matter. They would probably bring Cole home some night on a stretcher, an aftermath of one of his surreptitious parties. He wouldn't laugh any more then. That was a dead moral certainty.

In a few minutes he heard Cole's step again and something fluttered and brushed his hand. "Mail," said Cole's voice. He opened his eyes and an envelope was lying on the counterpane a few inches from his hand. "Thanks, Cole," he said.

He opened the letter and read:

DEAR OLD THING:

I'm glad you're feeling better. Somehow it doesn't seem possible for anybody to be sick this gorgeous spring weather. The roses are in bloom and they cover the whole west end of the house. We have vases full of them. I went up on the Prospect car line last Sunday morning with Julia McKinnon and you remember the cliffs that come down to the tracks there about a mile above Basey's? Well, the vines and shrubbery were thick—honeysuckle! You never smelled such gorgeousness. They rustled as we swept past them and it was so cool and green and fresh and fragrant. River looks good too, but it's muddy and I've an idea it's still a bit cool. We've been having a lot of fruit and berries. Everybody's

home. Everybody asks about you. Don't you think we could iron this trouble out here just as well as in Colorado? I'm sure I could look after you better. And it's been lovely. You couldn't be sick a minute, I feel sure.

Then came a lot of gossip and small talk.

Betty Hobson's landed a man. Think perhaps he put one over on her at that, if any man could put one over on Betty by marrying her. They looked him up in Bradstreet's and he listened like a million dollars. His name is Roy Colvin. He's from Newark, New Jersey. There's another Roy Colvin from Newark, so the story goes, and this other one is slimy with the stuff. All Betty's Roy has got is a dime bank. But he's a sweet dresser, so I guess Betty'll be brave about it, inasmuch as the announcements were out before they discovered the horrible mistake. Mrs. Hobson has gone to drown herself at Miami.

And by the way, Job, what's to hinder my coming out to you? I know it's fashionable to live apart from your husband, but the horrid truth is I'm getting anxious to see mine. It's plebeian and mid-Victorian and all that, but it's a fact, I am. Find me a nice little room in that little village that you call Aurora. Sounds as if it might have a livery stable and a store and everything—except a tree. It wouldn't cost so much. And John, dear, I can't stand it here much longer. You're not forgetting that, are you? You're not so brave yourself—even if you do keep your mouth shut. I want to be near you, helping you bear this tiresome siege you're going through. Not that I'm doubting for one minute that you'll weather this little squall in fine fashion, but we might as well have these things together. Aurora may not be all it should be, but in some ways it would be a thousand times better than this. Besides, I need a trip. Be reasonable, Job. You believe me, don't you? I'm missing you. Lots.

Love,  
PHIL.

He smiled as he folded the letter and slowly shoved it back in the envelope.

For a while a flood of memories came rushing into

his brain: the soft green of the trees, the mellow gold of the sunlight, the echoes of tradition, of past generations, warm and intimate, that would always come and hover about the old houses, along the lanes; the drenching rains and muggy nights, the sweltering heat, the miry roads, the sleet, the piercing cold, the mosquitoes and all. Louisville was a living place, a warm, a friendly place, a place of humanity. Here was emptiness with nothing between one and a relentless God except a patch of blue sky. When one died here he was no more than a stone, no more than those endless brown plains lying beneath an unshaded sun. And Captain Mellon had cashed in—after a month of it—and the people in Louisville were being sorry for him, Brawn. They were probably talking about him in low regretful tones: "Poor John Brawn.—It's too bad about John Brawn," with just a suggestion of patronage, of superiority. If he had been bumped off in France they would not have been sorry for him—even Phyllida. They would have been proud, instead. And after all there wasn't very much difference.

Rest hour passed rapidly. Promptly at five minutes after three Dorothy Peck arrived. She seemed brisker, brighter than ever.

"I almost got another man for this economics course," she said. "But then he could not come in with you—you're too far ahead. I wish I could get more of the officers interested. Somehow you officers are not interested in anything. The enlisted men are way ahead of you. All the officers want to do is play cards and run out nights."

Brawn barely heard her.

"Let's see. We're on page ninety-two, aren't we?



—Currency. —That's fine.—You know what currency is, don't you, Lieutenant Brawn?"

"Anything that circulates around, isn't it?"

"Ye-es. I suppose so. That's an original idea. According to that I'm currency too, aren't I?"

"Well, aren't you?"

"I suppose I am. But you're always putting in such funny, irrelevant ideas. This is economics we're studying. To hear you, we might be reading most any sort of book on general subjects," she paused and thought a moment. "Let's read a little out loud. And then we can talk it over. I think we can get more out of it by talking it over."

"So do I," said Brawn.

"Here's something I never thought of before. And yet it's good sense too. 'It will be economy for merchants to pay their debts with the cheaper gold sovereigns, and the silver will tend to go out of currency into the bullion market, where it will fetch more sovereigns than it would as coin in the currency.'—Which is the cheaper now, do you know, Lieutenant Brawn?—Gold, or silver?"

"I don't think that makes any difference," said Brawn. "Our silver dollars are just token money. A silver dollar hasn't a dollar's worth of silver in it. You can swap it for a gold dollar though that has a dollar's worth of gold in it. What he says hasn't anything to do with our money."

Miss Peck looked at him curiously. Then she opened the book again and was about to read some more. "Do you know?" she said, "I've an idea you know more than you make out. That you're just kidding me along. Sometimes I think that. But then I



suppose you're not. A man thinks differently from a woman."

"There isn't anybody knows anything about economics, really, Miss Peck. It's all pretty much bunkum. Anything that has highly paid experts that do nothing but talk is just bunkum, Miss Peck. I'm beginning to believe there's nobody much knows anything much about anything."

She glanced at him questioningly. "You're getting morbid again. Let's read some more."

The sound of her voice was pleasant to him, and the breeze was rather warm and her profile quite pretty as she sat with head bent, book in lap. He did not hear a word she was reading, merely lay and watched the movement of her lips. She was a fuller, more rounded type than Phil; her colouring was higher, her hands broader, likewise her shoulders. But it was good to look at her. Only it did not give one quite the thrill.

Miss Peck closed the book. "My half hour's up.—It's getting more interesting along here, don't you think?"

"Very much so," agreed Brawn.

Suddenly her face brightened. "I've a dandy idea." She looked squarely into his eyes. "You get a pass and we'll go in town next week and see the Mint. They tell me visitors are admitted certain days.—Wouldn't you love to go?"

Brawn turned away. "I don't know," he said quietly. "Not for a while yet. I'm sticking close for a while. Thanks though, for offering."

Miss Peck looked disappointed. "Oh, all right. Some other time then. Good-bye, Lieutenant Brawn."

For a long time Brawn lay and watched the sky patch. Slowly it began to darken. Then he reached over to the bedside and got a tablet and a pencil. He held the tablet in his lap and thoughtfully chewed the pencil. He began to write. He covered page after page of paper, writing rapidly. Then he seemed to pause—letting his ideas settle. “As for your coming,” he wrote, “it can’t be done.—At least not just now. I’m getting along fine. If I got out to look for a place for you, it might set me back and I’d have to go over all this again. Let’s be patient, Phil. I hope you see what I mean. This is a game. And I’ve got to win it. I can tell what it takes from here better than you can from there. And don’t you worry about me for one minute. Love. John.”

## CHAPTER XVII

**G**RADUALLY the passage of time took on the appearance of the rolling of a great wheel. The months were the spokes. Once a month came an examination. Once a month came the cold clammy fear of an unfavourable report to be followed by a dull depression. Brawn made no material progress one way or the other. There came to his mind the notion that there would be no change. Life was but a monotonous drifting, lazy and comfortable enough but leading nowhere. Day followed day, dragging along without sensation. But behind his increasing torpor lurked the certainty of a hideous and swift climax if he but deviated from the enforced routine. It was not to be expected that one could ever get well, become normal again. It was sufficient that one grew no worse, that one could live to feel the slipping of those endless days, dragging stupidly by.

He had not been moved to an ambulant ward. For a while the promise, the possibility, of it, had been an incentive. But June passed and July, and still he stayed on—Captain Parker compressing his lips and shaking his head each time the question was broached. In August, Brawn ceased to think about it. The sun beat down upon the plains for long dazzling hours. About midway in the afternoon would come rising

clouds and a whirl of wind, swift, metallic rain, and then a rapid drying off. Every day was just the same.

Brawn asked for a small table and a chair. The hardest time of the day was the few hours after sundown. Somehow it was the only time to shake his composure. Lying in the darkening shadows with the day sounds fading out with the light, he always felt much more alone. So he would go indoors and sit by the table for an hour or two and read, or write, as the spirit moved him.

One evening, about the middle of September, he sat with elbows propped on the table edge, the light from his drop socket ringing about his head like a halo. Before him lay a *Courier Journal*, opened at the sporting page. At his right elbow lay a sheet of typewriter paper on which were scrawled some figures. Brawn had been idly calculating the possibilities of Louisville's winning the pennant. There were so many games to be played. There was so much lead to be overcome. Then he had figured up the chances of some of the other clubs. Making these estimations had accomplished him nothing. Limply he let the pencil fall from his hand. It rolled on to the floor. There was a picture of the champion woman tennis player of the United States caught in a moment of tremendous activity. One foot was raised from the ground, the racket smashing down upon an invisible ball, the face distorted in lines of terrific strain. Sluggishly he speculated on how long he could last in a tennis match. It did not fret him. He was too utterly limp to care.

The wind was moving along the roof outside; it



made a curious whining noise in the cornice. The droplight was swaying slowly to and fro, moving its circular imprint across the paper like a noiseless shuttle. In the room beyond there was a low murmur of voices. Cole seemed never alone.

Suddenly it came to Brawn with relentless clearness that *he* was alone. If he should die, he thought, there was no one in all that place who would display more than a passing interest. There was no one who would be sorry, really feel it—not in the least. He would not be missed. His room would be occupied by another within twenty-four hours. His name would be rubbed off the ward roll and another substituted for it. His charts would go in to Washington, a closed matter. File Number 73,766 would be finished. There would be a certain amount of clerical satisfaction in the closing of it.

The murmur in the next room went monotonously on. It was a curious thing, this indifference that took hold on one. All one wanted was to be left alone. No one came to see him. He stuck strictly to himself. The contact that he had with the inmates was as casual as the acquaintance struck up in a railroad waiting room in some out-of-the-way station. Every one was a transient. He had given nothing; he had received nothing. For a while all he had wanted was to get out. Now all that he wanted was an endless succession of eventless days that would spare him irritation. He had nothing; the pajamas, the slippers belonged to the hospital. The table and chair belonged to the Red Cross. The newspaper was his, but it would be thrown into the incinerator on the morrow. His sojourn was as bare of human symbols as though

he were a log of wood going through a sawmill. Many years ago there had been another life. It seemed vaguely unreal, as if he had merely dreamed it. In all that past experience there was nothing that stood out now as a reality. Nothing had plumbed the depths of him, or if it had, ever, there was no memory of it now. People were but shadows; that past life a subtly glamorous but unstirring dream. His father was a tradition; his wife—he felt the faint, momentary rising of desire which quickly subsided. He hoped she was getting along on the one hundred dollars he was sending her every month. He was getting sleepy. Heavy-lidded, he watched the slow moving of the circle of light across the paper. Softly to his ears came the droning of voices in the next room. He looked at his wrist watch. For a moment it was nothing but some numbers and two hands sprawled across a dial. Then he realized that it was telling him it was nine o'clock. Bedtime. Unsteadily he rose to his feet and stumbled to the door.

The sudden rush of cool air roused him. The dressing room had been intolerably hot. He glanced at Cole's door and then he smiled softly to himself. It was dark. Cole was having quite a case with some one. The murmur of voices had stopped; the girl had probably gone home. He wondered who she might be. Some one of the many women on the post, perhaps. It did not interest him.

He dozed. Gradually oblivion slipped upon him. For a brief interval he heard the moaning of the wind in the cornice but it seemed miles away and ineffectual. Once he heard a cough. Sounds at night no longer roused him.

And then some one screamed in his ear. He sprang up in bed. He was immediately awake and he was trembling. But the darkness lay about him black and still. For just a moment he began to feel that he had dreamed it when a door opened and some one rushed out of Cole's room, a vague, sudden shadow that went streaking down the runway in the darkness. He caught a momentary gleam of white and then the light was flashed on in Cole's room and a hoarse voice was talking.

Brawn lay back in the covers. He was still trembling but a smile pricked the corners of his lips. And then he lay still and listened.

He did not recognize the hoarse voice which sounded as if its owner might be irritated. And Cole's voice surprised him with its calmness. Cole was laughing.

A shadow appeared at the door, and then the door opened and a man came out and peered around. Dimly, Brawn recognized that it was an officer. The porch was too dark and the light from the door was inadequate for him to see which officer it was. He surmised it was the officer of the day—on his rounds. The figure walked to the railing and leaned over, looking down for a moment. Then Brawn heard him grunt and then he went back into the lighted room.

"You're going to get yourself in trouble, Lieutenant. Lights out, no visitors after nine o'clock."

"I know, Captain," came Cole's voice, suave, plausible. "But she only got in this afternoon late. And I haven't seen her for over a year."

"Visiting hours three to four in the afternoon, Lieutenant."



"But," explained Cole, "the ward surgeon wouldn't give me a pass and that was the only way we could work it." He laughed. "She knew it was against the rules but we took a chance. Wish she hadn't run off that a-way though. Sorta puts me in bad."

The captain's reply was unintelligible.

"Oh, but have a heart, Captain."

Again an unintelligible reply.

"But I tell you. It *was* my wife. She just got in this afternoon, I tell you. You surely can't blame——"

The other voice came nearer the door. "Not that it makes any difference to me, Lieutenant. But the rules are definite and clear. Things are run loose enough in this place as it is. You should have asked for special permission——"

"Listen, Captain, if she hadn't run away that way, you wouldn't have thought anything about it, would you? You know you wouldn't." The voice was getting louder, gaining in assurance. Then came a pause. And then in a cajoling tone: "I kept telling her everything would be all right, but she's always been afraid of the army and army regulations."

Brawn smiled gently to himself; Cole was making out an elaborate case.

For a few minutes there was silence and then Brawn was astounded to hear a door open and the hoarse voice, clearer, admonishing:

"All right, Lieutenant. I understand how it was. But those things always come right back at me, you know. Watch your step in the future." From the tone, the captain enjoyed being a good fellow. He was playing the rôle, too, at considerable risk, he would have it understood.



"Thanks, Captain." Cole's voice was grateful.

"Good-night, Lieutenant,"—the captain paternally indulgent. . . .

Two days later, in mid-afternoon, Brawn met Mrs. Cole. She came out on the porch through Cole's room and impulsively threw herself upon her husband who had not quite recovered from the stupor of rest hour. She was wearing a dark blue suit of a clinging material, and the skirt was long and very narrow and twisted about her ankles as she leaned across the bed, so that it was with difficulty that she disentangled herself. Then she sat back and looked at Cole. On her head was a piquant little hat of tan felt caught up at one side and with a long pheasant's feather sticking out behind at a rakish angle. Immediately the air of the porch was permeated with a scent that was new to Brawn, shrieking sex and extravagant. One foot dangled over the edge of the bed—the skirt was caught up in a graceful festoon. It was a very small foot and the slipper had an absurdly high heel and a rounded toe. Brawn turned away his eyes and busied himself with his book. Every now and then, however, he would glance sidewise at them and invariably caught her eye. She was sitting on the bed, talking vivaciously to Cole, the little foot swinging to and fro restlessly, and she was looking all about her as she talked.

Brawn felt curiously excited. He had not really seen her face and had had only a hasty glance at her figure. He suddenly decided it would be better for him to leave them to themselves. So he reached out for his bathrobe that was hanging on the corner of his bed, slipped his arms into it and then slid his feet to the floor, searching for his slippers.

Cole looked over at him. "Come meet my wife, Lieutenant."

Brawn was slightly embarrassed. He shuffled across the porch.

Mrs. Cole held out her hand. It was trim and smart in a long suede glove. Her eyes searched for his, were not content with a passing glance. They were very dark and very restless. She smiled a quick flashing smile and he could see a gleaming row of small, regular teeth. "What is the name?" she asked.

Brawn flushed and told her.

"Pull up a chair, Lieutenant," said Cole.

"No. No," said Brawn. "I'll only stay a minute. Was going down the hall to get a book."

Mrs. Cole was smiling at him, looking at him intently. He could not understand why he felt so nervous, and he could not look at her directly nor long at a time and yet felt himself wanting to. She was quite small, but the lines of her body as she sat across the bed suggested a full-blownness, a maturity, though in no wise grossly so. Her features were likewise small and regular and there was a tiny line sloping obliquely downward from the outer corner of each eye. It gave her the appearance of squinting slightly. And she had rouged her cheeks and her lips—a little.

Brawn was silent. He stood leaning against the wall at the head of Cole's bed. Mrs. Cole, smiling at Brawn and watching his face, reached out a gloved hand and pinched her husband's cheek.

Brawn moistened his lips. "How do you like Colorado, Mrs. Cole?" he said in a dry voice.

She seemed to be studying him intently. Suddenly her eyes narrowed and she flashed him a dazzling smile. "I don't know," she said. Her voice was high and sharp and she drawled it through her nose. "I only got in to-day."

## CHAPTER XVIII

NO," thought Brawn. "I'm going into a shell. I ought to get into things more—mix around." He sat tilted back in a folding camp chair with his feet propped against the porcelain washbowl in the centre of one wall of his room. They had moved him the day before into E-2, an ambulant ward, at last. "I don't believe I can beat this thing by myself." The two large windows at the end of the room, curtained in dotted swiss, were open a few inches from the top. Behind him the glass door was shut and the curtains drawn. It was snugger and closer here than in Upper West. He had more of an individuality. It would have been a most agreeable change if the new ward surgeon had not "pinned the crêpe" upon him that morning. This new ward surgeon was a lieutenant—a Lieutenant Koontz. He had heavy black eyebrows and a blue-black chin and very thin legs and a stomach. He smiled perennially, lifting the corners of his lips away from his upper teeth, letting his lower lip sag, except when he became serious—as he did when he had examined John Brawn. Then the smile would fade away into a lugubrious slump—likewise the voice. "Oh, no, Lieutenant," he had said. "I should say not—you should not get a pass. You should be in bed—all the day. It is enough that you should walk to your meals. You're in bad shape,



Lieutenant." And then he backed away and gazed at Brawn mournfully.

Brawn's laugh was harsh. "You've all got the habit, haven't you? What do you fellows read—a medical corps manual?"

"I do not know what you mean, Lieutenant."

But nevertheless this constant warning had its effect. For a while Brawn sat with his feet propped against the washbowl watching the patch of deep blue sky out through the uncurtained upper half of his north windows. Indistinctly to his ears came the hum of conversation. A group of officers were gathered around a card table at the far end of the porch. An army truck went lumbering by, its gears grating horribly. There was a road a few feet away from his windows; he could see the dim outline of the truck through the curtains. "Well," he thought, and sighed, "I suppose there's nothing else to do. But I wonder if they're as gloomy with all the rest?"

He rose to his feet and began taking off his clothes. He had had a momentary satisfaction in putting on his uniform again, a feeling that in a fashion he was ridding himself of the stamp of the hospital—but evidently that was not to be. He kicked off his shoes and puttees, removed his blouse, loosened the collar of his shirt, and dragged himself up on the bed, a high, narrow thing on huge rubber-tired rollers.

He had hardly composed himself when an orderly opened his door and tossed in a couple of letters. Mechanically, Brawn picked them up, expecting one of them to be addressed in Phyllida's erratic handwriting. But neither one was. He was faintly surprised; her Monday letter was already two days late

and Phyllida had been more than ordinarily punctual in writing—as a rule twice every week.

He tore open the first. It was from Mowbray Hicks. There evidently had been such a person as Mowbray Hicks. It was a cheerful note with the ostensible purpose of showing Brawn that *he*, Mowbray, was conscious of no change in the working of the world.

Have been very busy. We're trying to put a young lawyer on the bench here in Shelby. We want to get rid of some of the fungus. This is a young man's world, now, since the war. Guess you're finding it so out in Colorado, too.

No, Brawn had no such illusions. There was no such thing as youth. The doctors had put youth in a purple-tinted mortuary.

Was down in Louisville the first week in September. The K. C.'s are building a drinking fountain in memory of George Ambrose. It struck me as a bit appropriate in view of the fact that George once sold bottles to the distilleries. But then you always liked him, didn't you? I suppose I ought not to be facetious.

And then came a lot of disconnected gossip in a light vein. Mowbray was trying hard to make it seem that it was a letter from one normal person to another. But at the end he forgot himself long enough to lapse into a normal solicitous tone: "Don't hesitate to call on me, John, if I can do anything in the world for you." Even the analytical Mowbray could not stand the strain of continued cheerfulness. He had to yield to a momentary spasm of commiseration.

Brawn tossed the letter over on to the table. Somehow the thing vaguely disturbed him. It was too patently cheerful. He was a piece of wreckage, he knew—wreckage from the war just as much as a house hit by a shell. Maybe he could be salvaged—maybe not. But he didn't want to have it rubbed in. Yes, there they were back in Louisville having as good a time as they could—folk coming back to town for the winter, theatres opening, leaves turning perhaps—though it was still a bit early for that—bright yellow sunshine and blue haze. And Phil—funny Mowbray did not say anything about Phil. No—he had not mentioned her—not a single word about her. It was the first time he had missed lauding her in almost maudlin fashion. Mowbray had always “thumped the tub” a little too heartily—as if he felt he had to, in some way.

But then there was the other letter. He slipped his finger beneath the flap; he ripped it open. A thin slip of newspaper fluttered out upon the counterpane. He fished in the envelope for the accompanying letter. There was none there. The clipping was all there was. Funny, for any one to do that.

He picked up the clipping and read:

### SOME SHOES FIT EITHER FOOT

#### DIVORCE PLAINTIFF MADE DEFENDANT IN COUNTER CLAIM

Mrs. Arthur N. Coleman thought when she secured all her elaborate evidence of the infidelity of her mate that her claim was as good as won. In the trial of the case, yesterday, before Judge Belton, it developed that Arthur N. Coleman himself is no mean sleuth. He testified that on numerous occasions his wife, Jennie, had been seen in public, at beer gardens and in questionable hotels



with other men. He intimated that such breaches of faith had been even more frequent than he had any evidence to support, inasmuch as he is a travelling man with a large territory.

Mrs. Coleman hotly denied all the charges. She is a large, striking looking woman of——

Brawn let the clipping fall. He had a cold, dead spot in the pit of his stomach—indeed, that organ was as if detached from the rest of his body.

“Oh, God!” he thought. “Now that’s come.” And then for several minutes he could not think coherently at all.

He just couldn’t take on the added weight of another trouble. It would kill him—that was all. Who had been the kind friend to send him—— He picked up the envelope and turned it over in his hand. The address was typewritten. Well, it was a delicate kindness, he was sure.

Phyllida had not written. Why had she not written? Too much occupied with that family of hers. He was no person to turn to; he was no good. They looked on him as “next to dead” back home. He was just a weight to her—she might even divorce him to clear her skirts. Why—he had never thought of it—she had even said as much that evening he and Ambrose had dinner there—the night Cloud had “horned” in. He was trembling all over now. She was a cool, calculating person, the kind to—— And there was certainly nothing to look for in her hereditary impulses, if there was anything in that. As a matter of fact, her letters had been mere woodeny bulletins here lately: asking him how he was—telling him who was getting married, and all that futile kind of stuff.

Lying in bed became at once unbearable. He would



suffocate if he did not get up. He raised on his elbow and slid his feet over the edge of the bed.

Some one knocked on the door.

"Yeah," said Brawn.

Dorothy Peck came in.

"Well," said Brawn, "I was wondering how about our classes."

She walked across the room to the end windows and stood with her back to the big steam radiator. She looked about the room from cupboard to wash-bowl, to army locker. Something had changed about her.

"When do we start?" continued Brawn, and then he saw that her lips were trembling. She would not look at him.

"I've come to say good-bye," she said.

"Good-bye?"

"Yes," she replied. Her tone grew brighter. She began to run her lead pencil along the corrugated top of the radiator. "Back to Iola. Dad writes he can't spare me any more. So I must be on my way."

He suddenly realized the fineness of her. "Yes, I can see how he couldn't. But what are *we* going to do?"

She looked down at the floor again and the sound of the pencil as she ran it along the metal furrow was harsh and nagging. "Oh, all of it has been nothing," she said. "You deserved so much more—all of you."

He wondered then if she had realized her limitations all along. Making the best of makeshifts. Playing the game. He was thinking what it was going to be like without those ridiculous lessons in public finance.

"I reckon," he replied slowly, "if there was a choice

of giving up—you or the doctors—why, it would be the doctors.”

“That isn’t such a compliment after all, Lieutenant Brawn—from you.” She laughed. “I’ve gotten a lot out of it.”

Her light blue dresses were always starched to the minute. There was never a spot or a rumple anywhere.

“So you’re going?”

“Yes, I’m afraid I am.”

“When?”

“This afternoon.”

They were silent.

Suddenly she looked up. Two bright spots of red burned in her cheeks. Her voice was brisk. “Well,” she said, “I must be hurrying on. I’ve a lot of these boys to see.” She was holding out her hand and her eyes were shining. “Good-bye, Lieutenant Brawn.”

“Why—a—good-bye.”

Her hand rested on the knob. She paused and turned around, half facing him. “I hope,” she stammered, “you’re—you’re going to be all right soon.”

“I’m sure I shall.”

“And,” she still hesitated, “I wonder if you’d—if you’d drop me a card—occasionally? I’d like to hear how you are getting along.”

“Why, surely I will,” said Brawn.

“Good-bye.”

“Good-bye.”

The door closed.

For a long time Brawn lay quite still, looking out at the blue sky. Then he smiled a faint, wry smile. He kicked off the covers and got up. He walked over

to the rocking chair where hung his clothes and began to dress. . . .

He pushed open the door of Major Bledsoe's room. "I'm looking for some excitement—— Oh, I beg your pardon!"

There was a chorus of laughter. "You found it," said the major.

Brawn backed away and was about to close the door. The room was full of people—of women.

"No, no," came a chorus and the major's sharp little voice, "Come on in, Brawn. You're amongst friends."

Rather timidly Brawn opened the door again and stepped in. "I'll never go opening doors again—unless I'm asked."

"Why not," replied the major, "when you have luck like this?" The latter was sitting, head leaning back, in a tall rocking chair. On the arm sat a girl in a grass-green frock, her arm resting lightly about the major's neck. Her hair was very yellow and her hat lay on the bed swathed in a honey-coloured veil. The major leaned back, displaying his skinny throat with the pointed adam's apple moving slightly up and down like a target. His eyes were dreamy; his little moustache points aggressive. He had laid aside his glasses. In the corner, by the washbowl, stood Captain Menowski, likewise in a bathrobe, and another girl was trying to get something out of his eye. She was tall and dark and supple. She bent away from him gracefully, his arm about her waist. Just for a moment did Brawn regard them. On an army locker at his feet, with her knees hunched up under her like a little girl, sat Mrs. Cole. She flashed him a smile, the lit-

tle crow's-feet appearing in a network at the corners of her dark brown eyes. She patted the top of the army locker beside her with a glove. "Come sit down," she coaxed. "It's been awfully dull for me. You look better in your—in your uniform," she commented, looking him intently in the eyes as he sat down beside her.

The woman on the arm of the major's chair giggled. "How else have you ever seen him, for God's sake, Bernice?" She reached over and smoothed Bledsoe's hair.

Mrs. Cole dismissed her airily: "You're crude sometimes, Grace. You forget this is a hospital and you have to overlook certain things," and then to Brawn, "So they've moved you over here? How perfectly fine."

Brawn was momentarily at a loss. She was most evidently not the conversational kind. One felt, rather, her presence. She was wearing the same costume, long clinging skirt, rakish little felt hat with the feather. Her lips were, if anything, redder than ever; he could see a thin crust above the lower edge of the lower lip.

"Your husband," he began, looking at her lap, "is he still——"

She burst into a shriek of laughter. "He wants to know where Murray is," she addressed the room. "As if I ever knew. Why, I never get within three jumps of him. Not in the last three years, I haven't." Her eyes were twinkling and yet they seemed to be reaching for him, desperately.

Brawn flushed. "It can't be you're behind him all the time. Perhaps sometimes it's the other way—re-



versed—head for tail.” He paused. That was not just what he had meant to say.

She looked at him curiously.

“Where is Murray—your husband?” he went on bravely.

She shrieked again. It was curious, the way she would be looking at him so seriously, so intently, and then break out in one of those spasmodic cries simulating laughter, with no warning change of expression. It was like a Jack-in-the-box and quite as startling.

“He wants to know where Murray is again,” addressing the room vaguely but gleefully. “Must be nervous, poor little boy.” She patted his hand.

After a few playful little pats she allowed her hand to remain on his, there on the army locker top. It was soft and warm and moist and he could feel the edge of a ring against his knuckles. He sat stiffly, without moving.

“It’s not that,” he explained at length. “I merely want to know which way to look for him.—Is he under the bed?”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Cole, raising her eyebrows and assuming a mock confidential tone, “I believe he’s a live one. How suspicious he is.” She leaned over and shook a wisp of her hair in his face. “Don’t be afraid, little one. Murray never wastes his time looking for me. That would be too dull for him. No. Much too dull.” She leaned away and let her eyelids droop, suggesting weariness.

Captain Menowski came and stood before them, a flat medicine bottle in one hand, a glass in the other. Captain Menowski was a tall, well built man of intense gravity and with regular features and lustrous

brown eyes. Women habitually told him he should go in the movies. It was that that made him grave. He poured some colourless liquid from the bottle into the glass. "Three fingers apiece," he said. "It's hospital hootch. Don't know whether it'll kill you or cure you but I got it out of the medicine cabinet."

Mrs. Cole threw back her head and drained her portion at a gulp. Then she pressed her handkerchief to her mouth as she returned the glass. Brawn could see the tears start in her eyes.

"Lieutenant?"

"Just a little," said Brawn.

It was hot, atrocious stuff. It had not the slightest flavour of whiskey—was raw and flattish. But as the glass passed around the comments were reserved, restrained, and complimentary. Any kind of post-Volstead alcohol needs must be treated with the utmost respect.

The six of them sat quietly for a moment, contemplating their respective good fortune, when Grace—she at the major's shoulder—rose to her feet:

"Time to be going, children. Our husbands will be nervous."

There was a haphazard rising and pressing toward the door. The tall, lissome brunette put her arms about Captain Menowski's neck and kissed him. He looked faintly annoyed.

The girl in the grass-green dress—the major's Grace—was standing in front of Brawn. She slipped her finger in a buttonhole of his blouse. "Listen, Lieutenant," she was saying, glancing archly, as she spoke, over at Mrs. Cole, "we're giving a little party next Saturday night—down at the Piedmont Hotel.

Just the crowd of us"—including them all vaguely. "Wouldn't you like to come and make it six? Bernice wouldn't mind, I'm sure."

"Surely he will," echoed from them all. Mrs. Cole looked questioningly into his eyes.

Brawn hesitated. He ought not. That was certain. And the slightest tinge of repugnance came over him. The crowd was so obvious. But something was urging him from within, a restlessness, a desire to flee—to be running away somewhere.

"It's easy, Lieutenant," said the major. "Won't need a pass. We'll all go in a car from the ward."

Brawn looked up at Grace. "All right," he said. "Count me in." And then he felt warm, excited—all over.

The party walked down the sleeping porch to the solarium, talking in repressed tones. As they crossed the door a couple of officers on chaise-longues looked idly up at them. A moment later they were telling each other good-bye. Mrs. Cole pressed Brawn's hand. "You're not worried, are you?"

Brawn looked down at her. "Why, no. Why do you ask?"

"I thought perhaps you might be.—About Murray, I mean." Her lips barely moved.

Brawn's scalp was tingling; he did not know what to say. He could hardly realize the rôle he was slipping into.

"You haven't heard?"

"No."

She laughed a short little laugh. "I'm a new kind of war widow. He's in—what you call it?—the brig?"

"That so?" Brawn responded vacantly. And then she gave him a wink and slipped through the door.

Brawn walked back to his room. He was tired. He sat down in the rocking chair and stretched his legs. He felt decidedly vague—as if he had done something he was not exactly sure of. His face was very hot.

Outside, on the back road, an automobile started up. He could hear the whir and then the deeper putter of the motor as it caught. There was a clank of gears and then the rush of starting and the crunch of wheels on gravel. It was passing the window. A woman laughed, loudly, rather musically, and the sound died quickly, swept away.

So!—That was how it was. Nothing mattered—nobody cared.—Everything had gone to hell.



## CHAPTER XIX

CURIOUSLY enough it was the suspicion that he had made a fool of himself that bothered Brawn. Women like the Bernices, the Graces, and the rest had never seemed like human beings in his past life. They were more like posters—highly coloured. They were not a part of normal life. And he did not know their vocabulary. He was a stranger to their mental processes—if they had any. There had been a fast, drinking set at home, but they had merely hovered about on the fringe of his consciousness. And before them he had been as mute as a raw traveller before an utterly *outré* bit of curio scenery. He never knew what was being said under the circumstances. Moreover, the elusive, drinking set was always a few strides ahead of the plodders. They always got the cream of the new sensations—clothes—drinks—vernacular. They were quick, precise, well oiled, and intolerant. They rarely originated anything, but their advance agents were feverish to pick up the newest. They were pioneers in audacity. Such was Brawn's estimate of a class he knew nothing of.

And that was what was worrying him about Mrs. Cole. He felt that she would go further than he. In fact, he suspected her of continually oscillating on the verge. That was what she got out of life—the excitement of being a tight-rope walker. And he knew

that if his nerve failed before hers she would ridicule him. Insofar as he had been an unknown quantity he had been a possibility. But the test would come and—was it worth it?

It was two o'clock. Every now and then Brawn would look at his watch just to keep in touch with time. He was nervous. It was Saturday afternoon and the thoughts of the impending party filled his mind with unrest. He was trying to be cool and circumspect about it. There was no reason why a man could not mix around with humanity. The world was to be lived in and all he had to do now was to live. They had taken all other alternatives away from him—thought, occupation, pleasure. And he had just lately accused himself of retiring into his shell. These people and their setting formed a background to modern life. They had no moral precepts. They regarded all conventions as merely serving the need of the moment: property was sacred so long as it was your own; law was endurable in so far as it protected you from annoyance; marriage a temporary arrangement of convenience, a picturesque and rather pathetic tolerance toward a worn-out idea—romance; work necessary sometimes to bring you freedom. That was all. Such was his estimate of them. So how could this party hurt him or these people? He at least had used his brain to think, not merely for his own amusement. He had the advantage of them there. Of Murray Cole he did not think at all.

He had turned the bed clothes and the pillow so that he lay facing the door and through the filmy curtain he could see beyond the sleeping porch to a dusty, bedraggled area flooded with sunlight. Every now

and then he would realize poignantly that there was a normal world outside this hospital—that there were other things than dust and weeds and gray walls and rubber heels and smug medicos and temperatures and night sweats. And at such times would arise in him a frantic spirit of revolt—a desire to put on his clothes, plain, inconspicuous civilian clothes, and flee—flee for days and days and weeks and weeks, until this place of fearful suggestions should be left for ever behind. And to-night he was to leave it temporarily for the first time—regardless of consequences. For a few hours he might even forget there was such a place. His heart was thrumming. He reached over the fingers of his right hand and compassed the wrist of his left. One, two, three, four—his pulse was running away. He lay back, with his hands at his sides, making himself consciously limp—like a mass of jelly. This was Captain Parker's prescription as to the proper way to *chase the cure*. He half closed his lids and watched the starchy curtain of his door, breathing slowly and regularly by an effort of control. It would not do for him to go beyond his strength on this first trip to town. He might not get another chance.

He heard steps along the bare floor of the porch outside, and then a shadow passed his window. It was a woman's figure. She paused at his door. Probably looking for some one. She was reading the card on his door. Queer that the nurse had let a visitor pass before the rest hour was over. He looked at his watch. It still lacked fifteen minutes of three. Curiously enough the woman reached out her hand to the knob. And then the door opened.

Phyllida stood framed in the doorway.

He lay and watched her. His heart gave one tremendous bound and then he was no longer conscious of it.

She came to the bed, bent over him, and kissed him—on the forehead. She did not say a word.

Then he threw his arms about her and drew her to him. He pressed his face against her breast and there came a hot stinging in his eyes and a great cold lump in his throat. And the pain in his heart began slowly to melt away; he had not known till then that there had been a pain there—all these months.

After a while she drew away and sat on the bedside, watching him. She was as beautiful as ever and there was something else more beautiful than beauty, in the slight tremor of her lips, the moisture that beaded her lashes. He reached out for her hand.

"What are you doing here?" he said softly, in the face of a sudden rising fear.

She leaned over close and looked him in the eyes. "I've come to take you away from this place," she said.

For a moment he made no reply. And then: "I'm not sure, dearest, that it's just the best thing to do."





BOOK III

PHYLLIDA RETURNS A FEW BOTTLES



## CHAPTER XX

AS THEY left Denver the air was heavy with the scent of burning leaves. The sun hung, a lazy, golden ball in an opalescent haze and in the shaded corners of the roofs still lingered lacy encrustations of frost. The dust churned up in a pungent cloud from their automobile tires and settled slowly over the grass by the roadside. Phyllida tucked the corner of the rug about Brawn's shoulder.

"Don't make such an invalid of me," he whispered to her with a nod at the chauffeur.

"Pshaw," replied Phyllida. "Don't be so stingy with yourself. I haven't had the luxury of being needed and appreciated for so long—you surely won't begrudge me!" She gave the blanket another twitch about him. "If that birdie ever had eyes in the back of his head he'd have had 'em put out years ago. He's a seasoned campaigner." She smiled down at him pleasantly, little wisps of her ash-gold hair twisting and curling about her temples. "You must forget you ever had a skin, Job—not be sensitive about anything. If I wanted to kiss you—right here—you shouldn't mind. This is something like it, *n'est ce pas?*"

"I don't suppose I should really," laughed Brawn. "But where'd you get the idea my skin was thin? It isn't, you know—not at all."

"Well, then, let's not talk about your skin nor my



skin nor what we have in them. I'm liking this weather you're having for me."

It was early afternoon and they had left the city behind and were rolling along gently, paralleling the great mountain range that guards the plain, and the sky was of screened cerulean fading off and blending into the more sombre tints that lurked in distant chasms and crevasses. On either side of the road were fields of alfalfa, past their last flower, and rows of gaunt and dry cottonwoods parched to their very roots. Occasional farmhouses peeked from clusters of trees, some plain and white and rambling, others with balustrade and turrets of rotting wood, survivors of the much-lamented "General Grant Period" of architecture and manners. The West had apparently borrowed with a free hand. Other cars whizzed past them, going eastward: one filled with coated and veiled tourists, belated in their perennial return and hurrying from habit, and another piled high with furniture and bedding, and taking its disconsolate time. "Going to the mountains," said Phyllida, "is apparently not being done—to-day."

Brawn smiled vaguely. He smiled at the mere sound of her voice. The sharp pressure of the wind upon his cheek, the kaleidoscope of colour blurring pleasantly, the sudden, insistent rise of an odour all outdoors and unknown and alluring and then fading or rather blending into another as strange—he felt as if he had been miraculously recalled to life. He did not trust himself to talk; and the rapid motion of the car, though easy, kept him breathless. He slipped his hand over under the robe until it touched Phyllida's—a quick, experimental touch—and he felt her

gloved fingers tighten over his and hold them fast. "You must have been mighty busy this past week," he said, musingly.

"Oh, by the way, Job. I never did get that lease for you to look over. The real estate man that rented me the house was a sweet old Rip Van Winkle—doesn't even know the war's over. He wanted to charge me seventy-five dollars a month."

"Gosh!" said Brawn, weakly.

"But he didn't get it," she quickly added. "We pay thirty until June first and fifty from then on. I told him his cottage would be empty and not earning anything all winter. He had not thought of that."

For two hours they kept to the plain and then at a little village they turned sharply to the west and approached the range. The sun was sinking so that the crest glowed with its proximity and keen little stabs of wind made the single robe seem thin and porous. Then to the right a shoulder of dull red rock unfolded from the landscape and stood outlined against the sky, a prehistoric battlement, solemn and tremendous. Immediately it was gone and they dipped into a valley fringed with cottonwoods and withering birch and golden aspens that whistled as they passed. Through another village presenting a row of squat shops with fronts of galvanized iron—a garish gasoline station picked out in glaring orange—a sign advertising chicken dinners, a cheerless, bleak message in the rising wind—and the sunlight flooding all, thin and yellow and cold. They bumped across a railroad track and the village was gone and the road went winding between rocky slopes and began to climb.

The mountains were approaching. As they slipped

along, with the shadows growing longer and deeper there came a sound like whispering in a topless vault. And the edge of the wind became sharper. Deep down within him Brawn felt a lifting—an expectancy. It was a sort of excitement veneered over with calm. The something within him was threatening to become too big for his body. The hospital was gone—left far behind, with its shrivelling, its nagging, its despair. Here it would not matter about him, his health or how he preserved it. Nothing in this climbing waste had regard for such trivial matters.

“I wish some of ’em could see this.”

“Who?—What do you mean?”

“Some of the old crowd—oh, any of them. I a—— This is new to me. Bigger than anything.”

She flushed, but was silent and a sudden thought of her mother invaded the peace of his mind. He looked at her and wondered if she could be thinking of that, too. But it was nothing to bring up now. He had burned that nasty clipping and would never mention it to her—never. She might tell him, if she wanted to, but he would never mention it.

“I doubt if they’d bother,” she suddenly broke the silence.

“Bother? Oh, yes, I see. But why not?”

“Why? Oh, times have changed. There is no old crowd. It’s every man for himself. It’s disintegrated. Don’t seem to have anything in common any more except being bored. And the new bunch! I should say not. Nothing so quiet as this for them.” She was watching the road unwind. “You couldn’t travel with them, Job—they’re geared too high.”

The car slowed down and crept across a precarious,



narrow bridge; beneath, dark rushing water swept grumbling over jagged rocks, throwing up a spume that was almost crystalline. The boards of the bridge rattled for a moment, there was a bump and the creak of a loose plank and the whir of the gears, and the bridge was gone; the stream wandered off behind a rock.

"Maybe," said Brawn, "I've not been so out of things after all."

"Not much more than you would have been at home. It depends on what you mean by 'things.' "

Now, he thought, they would talk about it, but the intense look that had momentarily hardened her features passed, leaving them dreamy and indifferent again.

The sun hovered above a dim blue line of pines on a distant crest. Before them the road unwound, hugging a rough wall of stone on the right. To the left was a stretch of scrambled rocks and underbrush, and beyond, a patch of deep blue pines stood clustered at the foot of the opposite slope. They turned a corner and all of this to the left fell away and dropped into a bitter chasm whence came the far-off, cold tinkle of a waterfall. The road hung as if suspended in mid-air; far below, the tree tops moved to and fro in a misty blur; all about them, like the sides of a cup, towered ragged, irregular cliffs' feathered with dull blue pines, cold and motionless; and through a cleft near the summit, to the left, a single dazzling sawtooth, a mountain top all pellucid ice and snow, glittered and winked in the clear pale sunlight like a lantern poked down in a well. "Oh! There!" said Phyllida.

They climbed and climbed. Came long stretches



of dense blue woods through which the road struggled like a healing scar. And down these woods the wind swept, whispering wearily. Came endless slopes of rock. And up these slopes the pine trees marched in Indian file against the sky, bending forward, toiling toward the summit which they never reached.

The sun dipped again. A sharp black line of rock was cutting it in two. A shimmery nimbus of gold flashed across a bottomless valley and lay for a moment upon a charred and blackened slab. Windrows of pines lay one upon the other like a tangle of tooth-picks dropped on a table. Each naked trunk stood out stark and blackened in the golden glow, and beyond them the snow caps flickered and sparkled in rainbow flashes and then went out.

"It doesn't matter much what we do here," said Brawn.

"Oh, no," whispered Phyllida.

"By the way, did you check out all the money from the bank in Denver?"

A half hour later they breasted a ridge and below them, far off, lay a great, green, grassy bowl. About it in a circle rimmed the mountains and across it the cloud shadows streaked, faint and long. There was a little cluster of white houses, and apart, an L-shaped building, yellow as taffy and with a bright red roof, stood on the crest of a swelling mound and faced the sunset.

"It's a pretty little place, don't you think?" said Phyllida.

"Is that it?"

"That's the village. We're a mile away—over to the right."

They stopped at a tiny real estate office and got the key. And then out a sandy road to the north they went, across the meadow, as the twilight gathered and the rose lights faded from the sky.

Then through a wide country gate, one corner of which scraped the ground as it swung back, around a tiny knoll, and a cottage appeared tucked up under the shoulder of the knoll, with its gable roof pulled down over its eyes. The brakes screamed as the car came to a stop.

Brawn clambered out. He was stiff and cold, interminably so, and yet it caused him no irritation. He was alight with excitement. The little house with its soft brown logs, the shadowy depths of the screened porch across the front, seemed to be regarding him appraisingly. Against the west wall, at the corner, a clump of yellow aspens was wagging its leaves at him. Here was home—really, truly home.

He climbed the steps to the porch. A little eddy of dust and trash swirled across his path. The front door, painted green, and half glass, barred his way and suggested delightful uncertainties behind its white curtain. Directly Phyllida joined him, rattling her keys. "I hope Mr. Bruce had the fire laid, as I asked him. *Brrr!* It's cold."

Then the door was open. They walked in—peering. First there was a room, shadowy and low-ceilinged, with green burlap covering the walls. Against the near wall stood a plain oak dining table. Before them was a sheet-iron drum for burning wood, and a chair or two. Phyllida stepped over and lifted the cover of the drum. "He has," she said.

"Sit down, Job. I'll scrape up a bite to eat and then

you for bed." She touched a match to the layer of pine needles and in a moment the drum was roaring.

"Say, Phil, this is a palace," he called to her. He could hear her tinkering about in the kitchen beyond one of the squatty doors. And he stretched out his legs to the warmth and leaned his head back against the head-rest of the rocking chair. *Now* he would begin to get well. There was joy and anticipation in the prospect.

In a little while Phyllida brought in a tray with a steaming coffee pot. She set the table and then sat down across from him in the candle light. They had coffee and toast and an egg apiece. And Brawn's eyes were shining.

It is trite to say that food tastes better in the country or in the mountains. It does not, after the first ten years. But Brawn sighed, after a while, and pushed back his chair.

"Phil, old girl!" he smiled at her. "You have led the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt."

She smiled back at him and then watched the candle piling its tallow on the candle-stick base.

"Reckon it'll stretch," he went on. "The ninety dollars?"

"Ninety?" she said. "I thought it was eighty."

"Ninety. I get ten dollars for you."

She smiled again, sleepily. "Think I'm worth that, Job? Leave it to me. I'll manage."

He went to bed. He slid shivering down between frigid sheets. His bedroom was a black box with a resinous smell. He could hear Phyllida stirring about in her room, which was the room adjoining, for some

time, and he lay and stared at the black ceiling and was happy.

And then after a while the homely, friendly little noise ceased and all he could hear was the rustling of the wind in the aspens outside his window and then a stirring and a settling. Something seemed to come up near to the house and sit down, watching. But there was no one there, of course. And then there came to his ears a gentle sound, a sound as of a myriad fairy feet treading the ground, the leaves, and the needles—a sound so soft as to be almost imperceptible and yet a persistent, ubiquitous sound. It was curious coming out of that stillness. He raised up on his elbow. The air was sharp and fresh against his chest. He peered out the window behind him. There was a faint gleam. He strained his eyes and looked closer, trying to make out some one sensible outline—a tree, a rock, a line of hill top. Before him stretched the dim, white surface of the ground. It was covered with snow.



## CHAPTER XXI

SAY, Phil, we've a view from our door," Brawn called over his shoulder. "Reckon it comes in on the thirty per? Makes one feel it's a waste of time not to be an artist. Just look at the sunlight on that cleft peak." He was standing in the doorway with a bathrobe over his pajamas, his feet in thick, lined, felt slippers. Across a rolling meadow that dipped gently away from the cottage to a grove of evergreens in a fence corner, the snow lay in a thin smooth mantle. The sky was faint and blue and very distant and about the mountain crests there was a curious ruddy glow that softened their outlines.

"I'll pull your chair out there after breakfast. You can have six months of that if you like it," answered Phyllida from the distance. There was a persistent sizzling noise and a popping of dry wood.

Brawn turned in the door and reëntered the room. He wandered about, hands in pockets, studying the walls. His hair was carefully brushed in front, wetted until it was slick; behind, it stuck out like a rooster's tail. "Hullo," he said. "Here's old John Bunyan—what's the guy's name?—going through a bagful of tricks. Here's the devil—Apollyon—selling him something. With his tail all crooked up over his shoulder. And here's—what's his name?—being vamped by three dames *à le Greque*. Here's"—he

chuckled—"the pearly gates and a rocky road leading up to——"

"Move, Job," said Phyllida. She came, head lowered, with a tray laden with smoking dishes. "Don't know why I use this silly little thing. Might just as well bring things in by hand. We'll hang that atrocity in the spare bedroom."

They sat down. "Rather like it," said Brawn.

There was a crisp, fresh feel in the air, even in the dark little room. There was an intimate way in which the green walls seemed to lean inward. And Phyllida, as she poured her coffee, with her hair all piled and tousled on top of her head was so delightfully matter of fact. Brawn laid down his fork. "Phil,—a—a—sweetheart," he began soberly. "Oh—Gosh, this is great."

She looked up at him gravely. "What is? You mean the breakfast? I've burned the toast."

"You know perfectly well what I mean. I——"

"Did you sleep well, Job?"

"Great. What I mean is——Well, it's just like camping out."

"You'll get over that feeling in about a week." She rose to her feet and carried the coffee pot kitchenward.

She returned. Brawn was studying the drum. "Have you got enough wood?" he asked.

"Hope so. Twenty cords."

"Who's going to cut it for you?"

"Why, I got it already cut. Don't you bother yourself about such things. I've got everything attended to. Have some more coffee? No? Well then, come on. I'll drag your chair out on the porch."

He sat and watched the lights swell and fade on

the mountain slopes, the changing tints. Beginning at a point straight ahead—in the army it would have been known as twelve o'clock—climbed a distant sierra of bleak and towering shapes, dazzling in the sunlight on their eastern slopes, pale and blue and ghostly and shimmering on the opposite. Nearer, and all about the valley, rose lesser hills, some wooded with spruce and pine in dark splotches against the snow, others bare and gray and rock-ribbed. Over to the right was a mountain shaped like a hen coop and on its near side the aspens were clustered thick, like rust. The sunlight was dazzling and Brawn could hear the faint drip of water from the eaves on the eastern side already beginning. In the house he could hear Phyllida moving about, whistling shrilly a tune which was new to him. A gush of sentimental warmth came crowding into his throat.

"Phil," he said, a little later on when she joined him for a bit of a breathing spell as she called it, "I don't like your doing all this work. And me lying up here, doing nothing."

She was rummaging in a sewing bag. "Don't be silly. That's my job. Yours is to sit there. Let's not go over that again."

"I know," said Brawn, "but still——"

They sat for a long time in silence. The sun was getting quite warm and it was evident that the snow would be nearly all gone by noon.

"When I came out here," said Phyllida, "to look at the house, there were deer tracks in the snow—clear up to the kitchen door. And there is a family of young rabbits under the house. Very poor judgment of the rabbits to have children so late in the

season, don't you think? Or it may be that they feel the softening of civilization—living under a real house—and don't have to bother about precautions." She looked up archly and her face was flushed. "I must confess, Job, that this pioneer stuff thrills me to death. I like to think of myself sitting in the doorway with a rifle across my lap and the snow and the wolves howling outside, and ten miles to more gunpowder. *Brrrrmp!* Instead of that all I've got to do is go one mile to the village for milk for you." She stooped over and bit off a thread. "I'm glad you haven't got a raging thirst, old dear. It would make all sorts of complications. Though it might"—she considered thoughtfully—"add some interest."

Brawn watched her silently. Slowly the realization came over him: she was his wife. This graceful, colourful, living creature was his wife. In the code of a few years back, his property. Even in the most modern acceptance she was the most intimate factor in his life not of himself. Until now she might just as well have been—his sister. Nineteen-seventeen seemed ages ago. He had been so busy with himself that he had not had time to consider what other people might be thinking of him. And now here she—Phyllida—was doing *this* for him. She was slurring over it as it might be expected she would: but she was *doing* it for him. There was nothing to say to that.

After a while she rose to her feet and flicked her fingers at him. She went indoors. Directly he could hear the pans rattling in the kitchen. There wasn't any further proof needed. He caught a look at the cold barren ridge of ice and snow and rock across the southwest and laughed.



The afternoon wore slowly away. About four o'clock she came and joined him for a little while—the sewing bag presenting sufficient excuse for idleness.

"Gee!" said Brawn, after a long while. "If this just keeps up long enough, just like this, I'll be in fine shape."

She was intent on her sewing. After a bit: "Your cough is much better already, don't you think?"

"Cough? I've never had a cough. I should say not."

Still she was intent on her sewing. "Then how can they tell there's anything the matter with you?"

He laughed, bitterly tolerant. "You don't know," he said. "Nobody knows. You can be apparently in blooming health and only three jumps ahead of the undertaker. That's the advantage of being in the army. They always tell you how sick you are. You can't fool yourself."

She looked at him curiously. "I see."

"But," he went on, "if a man could sit in a place like this and have the right kind of food and companionship like this, why, he could get well in no time, chasing without the labels."

"How long would it take, do you think, Job?"

Brawn considered the range. "Oh—a year. Maybe two years."

Silence.

"I'm not such a tonic after all, then. I don't work fast. Come on. Let's get in. Mustn't get chilled."

He wandered about the sitting room. He stood before a high, narrow bookcase built in the wall, reaching clear to the ceiling. His eyes wandered slowly down the rows of books, and presently he pulled one

out. "Huh!" he exclaimed—Phyllida was in one of the bedrooms straightening up. "Musta had a big family in this house. Most of the books on how to raise children. 'The Proper Care of the Young'!"

"Maybe there was just one offspring. People don't read books when they're raising a large family. The less time one has the less he wastes on technique and the more he gets done."

He stood before the bookcase studying the contents. Was that a dig she was taking at him? Perhaps not. She usually spoke out what she thought.

He walked over to the window and drew back the curtains. The window faced the west. Out from the crest of the near hill on the western horizon floated a feathery canopy of cloud with patches of deep blue showing through. The fleece was tinted from flaming crimson to softest yellow and mauve, and as Brawn watched it it changed in colour, without moving, and the light on the ground with it. Not a house was in sight, not a spiral of smoke. There was not a sound. Immediately there came upon him the spell of the solitudes, that complete acceptance that is mingled with uncertainty, that satisfaction that is tinged with yearning—beside which self is utterly trivial. He was not thinking—merely feeling. He felt a touch on his elbow. And then an arm slipped around his waist and then there was the warmth of a body. And the feeling slowly passed away—the awareness of things outside. No longer did he see the clouds drifting off from the mountain edge like scum from the edges of a pool. He was very sure. Things were entirely as they should be.

All that evening the thought persisted. He was

gay, even boisterous. Phyllida did not talk much. That was as it should be. She was busy with her sewing and sat with it in her lap. Her head, bent over it with the candle light deep yellow behind her, bewitched him, the soft ruddy tints in her hair, the quiet set to her lips, the curious smile about her eyes. "How can," he thought, "such beauty exist and not proclaim itself?" And then: "It's mine. It's mine. It's mine." But he said nothing.

At nine o'clock she looked up and smiled. "Bed, Job."

He stumbled across the threshold and kicked off his slippers and crawled in between the stuffy covers. There came a ruddy glow through the door which he had left open. It had been agreed that he should do so—for the time being at least. Then there was a soft rustle and the light disappeared. He settled back upon his pillow and his mind shifted to other things. He heard the wind spring up and begin stirring the aspens. A thin dry fluttering it was. He looked through the elongated strip that was the window from an oblique position and saw the ground shimmering cold in the moonlight. It was as cold as skimmed milk. And then far off down the valley he heard the yap of a dog and then many repeated yaps, sharp and with a hysterical catch at the end and then a prolonged *ooo-ooo-ooo*. For a moment the air was alive with the sound and then in an instant it all stopped. He was watching the ceiling wide-eyed. He realized that the light was on again in the room outside—the square ruddy glow of it was before his eyes. He had heard no returning footstep and there was not a sound in the room. He wondered if everything might be all



right. He edged over to the side of the bed and slid out on to the floor. The boards were cold and hard to his bare feet. He tiptoed noiselessly to the door and looked through.

And then between him and the candle a shadow passed. It was a graceful shadow—Phyllida, coming toward him, letting down her hair. Her head was slightly bent and her elbows extended. She was in her nightdress, a silken thing with lace about the neck and no sleeves. Through the sheerness of its texture he could see the outlines of her body dimly traced in the candle light. There were hairpins in her mouth. "Why do you——" she began.

She was only a step from him. He reached out his arm and drew her to him and the candle sent flickering circles of shadow across the ceiling. "Phil, sweetheart," he began. But she pushed him from her. He could feel her knuckles, hard and cold against his breast.

"Get back to bed, Job. You'll take cold." The hairpins made her voice seem muffled.

Slowly he turned and went back. She stood in the doorway, still letting down her hair.

"I came to see if you wanted one of your windows closed."

"Huh!" he exclaimed. "Closed?" He was suddenly irritated. "If anything I'd like to knock out this whole damn wall."

"Well," she said. "All right. It's nothing to waste any feeling over. Good-night, Job."

She disappeared from the doorway and directly the candle went out.



## CHAPTER XXII

**T**HE next day Brawn was self-conscious at breakfast; Phyllida on the other hand behaved with her usual composure. "Lots to do," she said. "Got to go to the village this morning. Shall I bring you some magazines, Job?" He began to feel that perhaps he was a bit ignorant in some of the essentials of marital relationship.

"Better lay in a store of stuff in case it turns cold and you cannot make the trip," he cautioned. He looked casually out of the window as he spoke. It embarrassed him to look her squarely in the eyes. "How was it you got a house so far out?"

She was pushing her chair back. "Rent, Job. Rent. Thirty dollars was all I allowed us in our budget for rent. I've got enough canned stuff to last us a year. Only thing that worries me is: Is this near-stove going to keep us warm enough? I've a great pile of wood under the shed just outside the kitchen, but can we bank our fires enough to last all night?"

Brawn got up and went over to the drum. He had a vague notion that keeping a fire was a matter of draughts. On the peak of the lid was a small cast-iron ornament. He took hold of this and began to twirl it thoughtfully with the air which a professional man always employs with a bit of homely machinery

that he is supposed to know all about. "Where do you take the ashes out?" he asked.

Phyllida went into her bedroom. In a few minutes she returned wearing her hat and cape with a leather bag over her arm. "Might drop a piece of wood in every half hour, Job. I'll be back before so very long. Maybe I can find you a little nog."

He brightened and looked into her eyes. "Fine. I'm pretty well fed up with milk. And Phil, I wonder if the Denver paper doesn't come out here? Maybe you could subscribe for a month or two. It's a good thing not to lose touch with the world."

"Yes. But who'd bring it out every day?"

"Yes. That's so."

She was gone. He walked over to the stove, lifted the lid and peered in. The fire was burning quite satisfactorily. He walked to the kitchen door and peered through. The breakfast dishes were all piled on a small oilcloth-covered table. Through the next door out on the enclosed porch which served as pantry, he could see shelves of supplies. Phyllida had planned her campaign. He turned about and went to her door. He paused there before it a moment and then pushed it open. Her bed was still disordered and there were a few clothes strewn upon a chair. Her wardrobe trunk stood partly open and the edge of a dress stuck out. It was green silk, pale sea-foam green. In that dark and meagre little room it seemed like a suppressed note of character. "Well, here I am," it seemed to say. "And why not? Perhaps you thought I was something else." Rather abashed, he backed away, closed the door and walked out upon the porch.

He sat down and tried to pull the covers about him although it was bright and sunshiny and warm. His eyes idly wandered over the landscape. Before him was a bit of enclosure with a barbed wire fence about it. Probably a garden once, fenced in against the stock. The meadow dipped over a knoll and rolled away to the pine grove. Far off, at the edge of this thick cluster of trees he could see the posts of a fence. Over to the right was the gate to the main road, though he could not see the latter from where he sat. He tried to picture Phyllida on her way to town. He had passed along that road only two days before but somehow the features of it had washed from his mind. He remembered that the way lay uphill from the village, and once they had crossed a bridge. And the sand had crunched under the wheels of the automobile. A mile was pretty far.

He sighed. And then he closed his eyes and tried to sleep. But there was a patch of sunlight on his knee and directly it began to get intolerably hot. He shifted his leg as well as he could in the swaddle of blanket. And then his head began to itch. He had to disengage his arm and thrust it upward through the folds before he could enjoy a long luxurious scratch. And then his cover would not go back just right and his shoulder began to get cold. He speculated on some shoulder straps which one might adjust from within without exposing oneself. He decided that being alone was not the thing for a sick man. He wondered what time it was. He looked at the shadows on the ground and then he craned his neck in an effort to see how high the sun was. Phyllida was probably not even in the village yet. Then he



kicked off his blanket and got up and went indoors. He walked over to the bookcase and stood before it. It was a dismal prospect for a solitary winter in a mountain cabin. There was a book on prenatal culture. There were many books on children and how to raise them. There was a volume entitled "The Man Paul." There was another volume on the progress the Baptist Church was making in Abyssinia. There was a lurid-looking text with the caption "Seven Months in Hell." By contrast this was irresistible and Brawn pulled the book down. It proved to be a dreary autobiography of a simple soul come to death grips with the demon rum, and the former's drab and awful victory. Brawn put it back in great depression. There was a college algebra, a book on correct English usage, Sallust in the original and so on. The only interesting thing about the collection was, as is the case with some social gatherings, the speculation how such an assortment could possibly have been got together. At last, on the bottom shelf Brawn found a bound volume of fashion magazines, ten years old and in good repair. A story or two caught his eye as he quickly thumbed the pages and he drew up a dining-room chair, sat down, crossed his legs and began to read.

He finished one story and then feverishly set out on the trail of the next. He was like a famine sufferer. It is reputed that such unfortunates frequently eat clay, old clothing, and even each other in a mere effort to counteract the inward pressure against their bellies. He must have sat for a long time, for he was startled after a while by the sound of feet on the porch and then the door opened and Phyllida came



in. Her face was flushed and she was breathing heavily. In her right hand she carried a large cylindrical object by a wire loop.

He sprang up. "What have you there, Phil?"

"Whew," she said, letting it down upon the carpet. "The foolish thing is not so heavy, but like the Irishman's goat it's not built to carry. It's a coal-oil stove."

Brawn tucked his book under his arm and walked over and poked it with his toe. And then he looked at her. She was fishing packages out of her leather bag and her hair had come loose and was twisting about her neck and shoulders.

"Don't you think," suggested Brawn, "that we're spending a bit too much money on the house?"

She emptied the bag and went into her room to hang it on its customary nail. When she returned she was smiling, but still breathing a little hard. "And what have you been doing? Find the porch too cold?"

"Oh, reading a little," said Brawn.

She stepped over to the drum and lifted the lid. And then she looked at Brawn. "You've let the fire go out. It's the devil to start. . . ."

Two days later the cold snap came. That was what they called it in the village. "Snap" was a trivial name for anything so devastating. First there was a high wind just an hour or so before sundown, with piling clouds. Then it began to snow. There was a great, empty howling above the house and every now and then a thin whistle and zip. In a little while there came a powdery drift under the front door, upon the straw mat. Phyllida got some old rags and

stuffed them along the sill. Then she brought in a double armful of wood and stacked it behind the stove. Her eyebrows, as she came through the kitchen, were crusted with snow and little beads of moisture glistened on her lashes. "Wish the kind soul who built this house had put the wood-shed under the same roof."

Supper was quickly over. They pulled their chairs up close to the drum which was roaring away in great style. Indeed, it threatened to set fire to the burlap that covered the wall behind it. But somehow the room grew chill in spite of the fire and after a while Phyllida got up and went out and when she returned she had a long knit scarf about her shoulders. Brawn opened his fashion magazine and tried to read, but he kept hearing the drum-drum of the wind, rushing in an endless procession past the house. Then there would come a comparative lull and then the sharp rattle of sleet against the weatherboarding. And the fire roared hollowly, disconsolately up the chimney.

Phyllida went into the kitchen and got out the coal-oil stove, set it on the floor near her door and stood back, regarding it. "Stove's all right. But we haven't any oil—at least hardly any." She laughed ruefully.

They went to bed. The air in Brawn's room was bleak. He kept on his socks and his bathrobe and crawled shivering in between the blankets, scorning for once the softness of the sheets. He drew his knees up under his chin. The wind came whistling in the room and he could feel the wet sting of the snow even where he lay, ten feet from the window. His nose was icy and wet and his eyes smarted even through

the closed lids. Was a lunger, he thought, supposed to keep his windows open in such weather as this? After about ten minutes of it he decided to compromise; he crawled out of bed and pulled down the window with the western exposure. At once the fine driven sleet ceased. The other window seemed to be unoffending in that respect. He crept back into bed shivering and chilled to the marrow. He wiped the moisture from his eyes, caught hold of his ankles and drew his knees up under his chin, and after a while he began to get warmer. He wondered about Phyllida.

He slept.

When he awoke he was stiff and very sore. Gradually he stretched out his legs and could not conceive how the blankets had got so cold. The muscles in his legs ached. He tried to stretch them, tried to relax, but the relief thus secured could not compensate for the chill. For a short while he moved restlessly about, trying to keep warm, trying to restore circulation, and then he gave it up. He sprang out of bed and ran across the room to the door. He noticed that there was a feathery edge of snow on the floor beneath his window. He flung open the door to the living room, eager for the fire.

On the floor in front of the drum, Phyllida was kneeling. She had a scarf about her head and she wore her heavy tan cloak. She had her head down nearly parallel with the floor and was peering into the drum via the ash trap. As he opened the door, she looked slantwise up at him and grinned. "Looking for the fire, Job. Here! You get down here and blow. No never mind. Of course you can't."



Brawn felt a sinking feeling. The room was like a vault. "Is it out?" he asked, hollowly.

She bent to her task. "No. One stick is burning, I think." She was blowing again, so that her neck was purple. Her right ear was against the floor, one leg stretched out across the matting; one foot free of her cloak. She was wearing a pair of tan oxfords. "Wish I had thought to bring in a pile of pine needles."

Brawn spied the coal-oil stove. He stepped over her and approached it. "How about this thing?" He began to shiver. The air was sharp about his legs even through his wool socks.

"Might empty the lamp and pour some in," suggested Phyllida, without altering her position.

He got the lamp and carried it to the stove. Then he was at a momentary loss as to how to open the reservoir of the latter. After barking his knuckles, he found that the whole top bent over and was meant to lay on one side. He accomplished this with some misgivings. He unscrewed the top with numb fingers and then lifted the lamp and began to pour from one vessel to the other. His hand trembled a little and the oil splashed over. It was a strain on him, stretching over to see if he was pouring straight. But finally it was accomplished. With a sigh he saw the lamp reservoir empty itself in a greasy trickle. He straightened up. And just then Phyllida, too, sighed and straightened. Her foot moved across the matting in a rapid arc. It intersected in its passage the line that the stove cylinder made along the floor. And it turned it over. Brawn sprang forward with a shout. But in her efforts to avoid trouble that she could not see, and with another spasmodic movement,



she kicked the cylinder further. It rolled. And a greasy stain appeared in its wake and spread across the matting.

Brawn rescued it and set it upon its feet. "You've wasted all the coal-oil," he said reproachfully.

She looked at him, face purple, eyes bulging. "Why don't you look where you fill your old stove? This one's burning anyway."

They made no further reference to the misfortune, being too engrossed in the prospect of warmth. They dragged up their chairs and sat huddled against the sheet iron of the sides.

After a while Brawn looked at the disgraced cylinder. And then he looked at the dark patch on the floor. "Reckon there's enough in it to light?"

For a moment Phyllida was silent. "Hope so," she said. "We need some for the lamp. If there isn't we'll have to go to bed before it gets dark."

Brawn looked at her in amazement. "Do you mean to say there's no more coal-oil in the house?"

"Right," replied Phyllida, a little too gaily for his outraged feelings. "We might try melting some butter."

Somehow, as he went to bed that night, he felt anything but a newly married man. He thought for a fleeting moment on the hospital and the tremendous steam radiator in his room. He heard Phyllida stoking the fire; she had said she would sit up for a while and keep it going. She had been keeping it going all day long. That was about all she had done. He had lost count of the number of times she had gone out to the shed for wood. And yet the room had been flat and lukewarm. And he had had to put

on his overcoat over his bathrobe and Phyllida had laughed at him. She had not looked too conventional herself, with her ears all bundled up and her long yarn mittens and her eyes watery, too. Women go off into shrieks of laughter over nothing. It was, he supposed, because of the strain on their nerves— weaker on the whole than those of men.

Another night of acute discomfort: one's legs seemed to be distressingly *de trop*. If only he could have cut them off and folded them alongside his body for warmth! All night long the wind went rushing past. He wondered where all the wind could possibly have come from. Every now and then there would be the sharp spatter of sleet flattening against the wall of the house.

Another awakening, as cold, as bleak, as dreary as the former. The light was gray in the square of the window and the wind had abated not one whit. Painfully he struggled to his feet and closed his one open window. Then he opened the door to the living room and walked in.

Phyllida was sitting in an arm chair before the drum. Her head leaned back across the head rest; her scarf trailed across the floor. Her lips were slightly parted and at the sound of his door she slowly opened her eyes and looked at him, heavy lidded. Then she stooped over and picked up a stick of wood and pushed it through the door. She yawned. "Rough night," she said wearily.

His conscience smote him. "You haven't—you haven't been sitting there all night?"

Slowly she arose to her feet. "Why not?" she said. "'S warmer than the bedroom."

Brawn walked over to the window in impatience. He plucked aside the curtain and gazed out. The wind was streaking visibly across the meadow, lashing the pine tops with a brittle foam. "It won't do," he protested. "Why, it isn't right."

"What are you going to do about it?" inquired Phyllida from her chair, with a long, luxurious yawn. "The darn fire wouldn't bank and some one just had to sit up with it."

"We can get some coal," suggested Brawn.

"Coal's twenty-four dollars a ton. And how long do you suppose a ton would last in this?"

Brawn walked away from the window and stood facing her. "We ought to go back to town—stop in some little hotel—anywhere—where there's a fire."

"On ninety dollars a month?" She rose to her feet and stood smiling quizzically at him. "Come on, Job. Be a sport. This can't last forever. Think how good it'll be to tell about."

"But," went on Brawn, "I'm afraid——" And then he checked himself. It was not just right to burden her with his worries.

On the fourth day it began to moderate. At about eleven o'clock the sun came out and the clouds faded from the sky. The glare was dazzling but the warmth in the doorway was very grateful and the snow began at once to melt. It had piled up against the western side of the house in drifts four feet high, so that they half obscured Brawn's window.

At breakfast he noticed that Phyllida had begun to snifle. Her eyes were red rimmed and every now and then she sneezed. But she went about her work, clattering the pans in the kitchen. The fashion magazine had



yielded its entire fruit, chaff and all, and Brawn was now in his fourth week with the evangelist in Hell.

In the midst of a dreary passage reeking with alcoholic fumes, he was aware of Phyllida's step in the room. He looked up. She was going into her bedroom. He returned to his reading but after a little he realized that she was staying there quite a while. Everything was still.

He laid the book down. He walked over to her door and looked in. She was lying on her back upon the bed in all her clothes. As he appeared in the doorway he could see the gleam of her eyes beneath her lashes. Her face looked flushed. She spoke to him:

"Job, I wonder if you wouldn't go to the shed and bring in some more wood? I'm afraid the fire will go out and you know what a mess it is to start again."

He was startled. He wanted to go. But then a detaining hand laid hold of his consciousness. "Go slow," something seemed to say. "Go slow."

He hesitated. "But, Phil." He faltered. "I don't know—I hardly think—the doctor said for me not to——"

She sprang up. "Surely. I was only kidding. Of course you mustn't."

She went past him. He seized her by the elbow. His voice showed his concern. "You're not well, Phil. You're feeling bad, aren't you? Gee! I don't know—I wish——"

She pushed him aside. "I'm all right. Just lazy, that's all. I was dreaming I was in a suite in the Brown Palace." Her voice was hoarse and dry.

He frowned, was at once troubled. Suppose she should get sick——



## CHAPTER XXIII

**T**HREE weeks later they met Mr. Piggott. Phyllida was trudging along from the village. She had reached the top of the long hill and the last turn where the dwarf pine stood precariously on the very edge of the road, when she encountered a drift of snow. It was deep—above her knees—and while her riding trousers and high-laced boots impeded her but little, the going claimed her entire attention. It was not until she had scrambled out on the hard bank that she realized a man was looking at her.

He was a small man. At least he was slight, though of about normal height. And he looked as cold as a detached icicle. He was leading a cow by a piece of clothes line. His coat hung open and he wore a pale blue cotton shirt, buttoned at the neck but with no tie. And his hands were bare—quite bare. He had the mildest eyes and his face was pink and white and smooth like a baby's. Almost—from the expression of his face—she had caught him dreaming in the snow.

As she looked up he smiled. It was a sweet, rather lugubrious smile. The eyes were languid. "Think I'd better tear a hole in the fence," he said, "and lead the cow around."

She stamped the snow from her boots and looked at him, warming. "Isn't it a mountain cow?"

He laughed. As he laughed he threw back his head, showing the point of a bony adam's apple. His laughter was not hearty; rather it was as though convention demanded that he be cheery and sociable. "I know what you mean," he replied. "I ought to put snow shoes on her."

Phyllida started. She had run upon a character. "Do you feed her an anti-freeze mixture?"

He looked a bit puzzled at that and then smiled slowly. "No," he said. "It ain't that kind of a cow." And then: "You live in the little brown cottage, don't you?"

They were standing a yard or so apart, between them a puddle of clear snow water; she with her bundles; he with his cow. Yes, she admitted she lived there.

"Had some pretty rought weather," he essayed, his eyes never leaving her face.

"I have been warmer," replied Phyllida.

He seemed to be at a loss. Apparently he was considering whether he would go on or whether courtesy demanded that she make the first move. He was influenced by such considerations. Then: "Got everything you need—there in the house?"

Phyllida was enjoying him, his voice, his mild blue eyes, his unruffled manner. "Why, no," she said. "Could you bring me a tree?"

"A tree?"

"Yes. A tree. A Christmas tree—a sticky little spruce."

He smiled, showing a row of very white teeth. "All right," he agreed. "When do you want it?"

"Oh, not now—not till next week. Christmas eve

will do. I—I'll pay you for it," she hastened to add, and then as a shadow passed across his face: "And you might drop in for the party—some candy and things. You live around here, don't you?"

"Thanks," he replied. "I'd like to. Yes, I live around the hill."

"All right. That's fine. We'll expect you—with the tree. On Christmas eve, remember. That's next Thursday."

She left him standing by the road, holding the rope, and thereby the cow. A few minutes later she looked back and saw him standing, still by the puddle, watching her. . . .

On Thursday afternoon Mr. Piggott brought the tree while she and Brawn were still at the table. For a moment it did not seem possible that it was just a Christmas tree. "But it's too big," she greeted him from the door. "It won't come in the house—through here."

He looked up. "We can pull some of the branches off," he suggested, looking back at it. He had dragged it through the snow, the path was quite distinct back as far as the gate, and there was no telling how much farther.

She relented, he looked so frail beside his burden. "All right. But shake it off on the porch here."

True enough, it was too large. Mr. Piggott had to prune off branches with his knife, a murderous-looking thing with a stag-foot handle. Then he went for a soap box, with which he returned a few minutes later. The box had a hole cut in the top. He had thought of that. Phyllida had misgivings; Mr. Piggott looked too fine-drawn for heavy draught work.

But he surprised her. The tree was lifted; the stump was fitted in the box stand. And the top brushed the ceiling and bent over—too high by over a foot.

"That won't matter," said Phyllida. "Brush the cobwebs off."

"Aren't any spiders," replied Mr. Piggott. "Not this time o' year."

Then they discovered that the tree took up too much room. There was no way to get out into the kitchen. It threatened to block any entrance it was placed near. And it was quite ragged on one side where Mr. Piggott had stripped it of branches. It was not a domestic-appearing tree; in truth it had quite a primeval air. So they decided on the corner by the bookcase. "Better get what books you want out first, Job," she suggested. "It's going to take root there."

Brawn came out from his sheltering bedroom as the tree swayed up into its corner.

"This is my husband, Mr. Brawn," she said to Mr. Piggott. "But I'm afraid you have the advantage of me."

He disclosed his identity. "Two T's," he explained. "And two G's."

"Job," said Phil, "there's some candy in on my dresser. And I've left a pitcher of something wet in the kitchen. Suppose you and Mr. Piggott keep the house while I go to the village for the mail. I'll not be gone long and maybe he can help you trim the tree. There's candles and some paper chains." She went into her room and returned with her purse. "How much do I owe you, Mr. Piggott?"

The latter, sitting in a straight chair by the dining-



room table, raised a protesting hand. "Not a thing, ma'am. Not a thing."

"But—I can't let you drag that huge thing all that distance for me for nothing. Why, there's a cord of wood in it."

"'Tis rather large. But I couldn't take nothin' for what I've done."

"All right," she gave in. "But you must stay and have some supper with us. I'll not be gone long."

He murmured something unintelligible. As she passed through the door his eyes followed her, withal a bit regretfully. . . .

She came in the back way when she returned from the village three hours later, and as she opened the door from the kitchen she must have surprised them. For they started—each of them. They were sitting in opposite corners and her first impression had been that they seemed not quite cheerful enough. She came and laid her packages on the table. "I've some popcorn here. Maybe after supper we can pop some over the coals. You'll stay, Mr. Piggott?"

The latter started from a reverie. "Oh, no'm. Not—a—a—to-night." He flushed slightly and then looked at her with a mild melancholy. "No'm. Not to-night." And then he caught a sidelong look at Brawn.

"Oh, but we'll be disappointed. We had quite counted on you."

Brawn sat and gloomily gazed at the fire.

"I really must be gettin' on," explained Mr. Piggott. He pulled out a small silver watch from the side pocket of his coat. It looked like a woman's watch. "I ought to be goin' now." He rose to his

feet but made no other effort at departure. "I was tellin' your husband, ma'am, that he oughta get out in the hills, tramp around more. There was a feller came up here four years ago—like your husband"—glancing quickly at Brawn—"and he cut himself a long stick and he tramped all over this country—clear back to Ward's I used to see him. Stayed out here two years and then he went back east again. Never heard of him since, but he musta got all right. He never came back."

Brawn glanced significantly at Phyllida.

"Yes? That's interesting."

"I told a—your husband, he'd never do no good just sittin' around the house. Blood gets cold and congeals for want o' exercise." His eyes never left her face with their searching look.

Phyllida smiled. "I think they have different ideas now from what they used to have." Turning to Brawn: "You haven't trimmed the tree."

"No. We haven't got round to it." Brawn's voice was sombre.

Mr. Piggott looked from Phyllida to Brawn. "Well," he said, "I must be moseyin'. Thank you, ma'am, for your kind offer." He stood in the doorway, twirling his hat, reluctant still.

"I'm sorry you must go," said Phyllida.

"Yes," he agreed. "And—in case you need me for anything," he went on in a hurried manner, "why, just call on me. Good evenin'."

"Thank you, Mr. Piggott."

He pulled the door sharply after him.

Phyllida got the cloth and was spreading it upon the table.

Directly Brawn spoke: "Anything in the mail?"

She did not look up. "Nothing much. A letter from Mama."

Silence.

Then from her: "Did you have a pleasant time this afternoon?"

"God!" Brawn exploded. "He's been on the fire department. Little town east of here. Told me all about the patron saint of their local fires—an old rascal with a wooden leg and the smallpox. Had to build him a little ladder so he could climb up on the truck. In a moment of weakness I told him I was in poor health. Never again! He gave me the history of every unfortunate that ever came into this country. It's a burying ground, not a summer resort—to hear him. Pah!"

She was bringing in a small stack of plates, which she distributed in their proper places on the table. "I thought he would be rather amusing," she protested quietly.

"At an undertaker's banquet, yes. What's in the letter?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing much. She asks about you."

Brawn was silent. Yes, she would do that. Anybody would do that. He was a curiosity; gone to Colorado for his health. Pretty bitter blow for Mrs. Coleman, he shouldn't wonder.

"She suggested coming out here," Phyllida resumed very quietly.

Brawn gave a start. "Well—I don't see how she could do that just."

"Oh, no," said Phil. "She couldn't, of course. She was just wondering——"

## CHAPTER XXIV

**F**OR two weeks the Christmas tree stood in the corner, a mangy outcast. Then Phyllida had Mr. Piggott drag it out. He summarily dumped it on a snow bank a few yards from the front door where it stretched up disconsolate and bedraggled branches from its recumbent position like an abandoned beggar. Then the sun came out for a week of unusual warmth and the snow melted throughout the meadow, all excepting a little patch under the tree, and the chipmunks came and nibbled at the withering needles and some wiry little wrens swayed for momentary breathings on its dry twigs.

Winter had apparently signed an armistice. The sun shone brightly, the wind that had worn a groove down the cañon from the divide to the southwest was busying itself in other quarters. The ground was drying as in midsummer. And Brawn had moved his chair out to the freedom of the porch again.

One day—it was the second of the warm spell—he arose in the morning and dressed. The novelty of his civilian clothes had not worn off and he was pleased with the texture of the suit. Phyllida looked up at him with mild surprise as he came in the kitchen. “Better be careful, Job, and not let any grease spatter on you.”

“Pretty good fit, eh Phil?” he commented, smooth-



ing the lapel of his coat. He had always been a bit vain, a bit extravagant with his suits. "Think I fill it out better."

After breakfast he ventured out on the grass plot in front of the house. The road looked dry and inviting, so he started slowly up the slight grade toward the gate. It was delightful with the warm sun on his neck. There was not a cloud in the sky and the pines against the brown of the near hillside looked fresh and dark and blue.

He was not weak, not at all, though it should not have been surprising after his long confinement if he were; so he continued to stroll along the road, deep rutted and lined with matted grass and moss, until he reached the gate. He leaned his elbows upon the top rail and gazed up the highroad. Solitary, it wandered across the meadow between twin lines of wire fencing, dipped into a gully, climbed a hill all brown and splotchy with sage, and then stretched off in the distance, vanishing into the indeterminate mix of earth and sky on the horizon. What it was doing there, in the utter solitude, was inexplicable. Far off, in the centre of the meadow, rose a great pile of rocks, on their crest a single, naked pine tree like a flag pole. But in all that valley, as Brawn stood leaning upon the gate, not a single living thing disclosed itself. The sunlight flooded down from a cloudless sky, the trees were motionless as though painted on canvas, the sage like little daubs of a brush.

After a little while he turned around and retraced his steps. He entered the house by the kitchen door. On the back porch he found Phyllida bent over a small washtub, her hair loose and in great disorder, her

arms bare almost to her shoulders. The sight of her gave him an awkward pang; he had felt all mellow in the sun. He came and stood beside her. "Phil, old girl," he said solemnly, "it hurts me to see you doing this."

She tossed her head to shake an offending wisp of hair out of her eyes and then bent back again. He could see the perspiration in beads upon her temple. "Shouldn't be so proud, Job. Nobody knows about it."

She was not responding to the weather, it was apparent. By the door was a kitchen chair. He sat down and watched her. She was sousing the linen in a tub of clear water to rinse it, wringing out each piece and piling it then upon an upturned washboard. It pleased him to talk.

"I've been a curious mate, eh Phil?"

She paused a moment, her hands still in the water. Then she gave a towel a vigorous twisting flip and slapped it down upon the finished pile. "You surely have," she agreed. "But, for that matter, all men are curious critters—hard crust like a June-bug; soft like butter within."

"Aw, Phil."

He tipped his chair back and sat balancing on the hind legs.

"Be careful. Don't turn my boiler over. You haven't any business sitting out here in your good clothes."

Slowly his mellow complacency began to fade. The slosh of the water in the tub was monotonous. It challenged his nerves. A sudden realization of his uselessness welled into his mind. "Phil!" he insisted.

She did not deign to look up.

"Don't you think that I'd better go back?" There was a rising inflection of doubt, cajoling her into speech.

"Back where?"

"Back to the hospital."

She gave him one scornful look and then plunged her arms into the tub again.

"I'm not doing any good here," he ventured after a while.

Apparently she did not hear him.

"How did you happen to marry me anyway, Phil?"

With vigorous decision she picked up the tub, carried it to the door and poured the water out upon the ground. It made a rich, sloshing sound. Then she carried the tub back to its stand on a soap box and began filling it again from a water bucket. "What have you been reading lately, Job?"

"Nothing—But you haven't answered my question."

She paused and again regarded him—appraisingly. "Well," she said, "maybe I was lonesome. I hadn't thought about it. Then again it might have been your uniform. It cost you ninety dollars, didn't it? I really don't know. You're not holding it against me, are you?"

"Aw, Phil."

She began to souse the already rinsed skeins in the fresh water.

"You're not going to wash 'em all over again? I think you're a bit rough in your fun sometimes."

"Don't worry so much about yourself, Job. There might be something in you yet. You can't tell."



He allowed the chair to settle foursquare with the floor and sat darkly viewing the wall whereon hung shelves and shelves of canned food. It was a cramped and shabby pantry. Behind him the stove simmered away not three feet from him. The kitchen was not much larger than the galley of a dining car. And it smelled sour. The little house with its five rooms—all tiny—seemed to press about them. Like squirrels in a cage on an open porch they were with the meadows wide and open, the limitless peaks and ranges beyond, and the road that wound across the skyline to Lord knows-where.

"It's just this," he broke out bitterly, "you could make out better on the ninety dollars if I was out of the way. I could go to the hospital and get my board and lodging free. Ninety dollars is not so bad for one person. You could get along on that——"

She laid down her washing, turned, and faced him in the doorway. There was a curious set look about her mouth and her eyes were dark and questioning. "Now, Job," she began, "let's have no more of that. If you felt that way you needn't have got your discharge. One hundred and sixty is better than ninety, too, if you want to argue that way. That isn't the point. Thank God we don't have to consider money in everything." She was rolling down her sleeves. Then she began to tuck in her hair.

"Aren't you going to finish?" said Brawn.

"No," she replied rather shortly. "I've enough."

"Why, Phil!" It shocked him to see that her lips were trembling. There were actual tears—dry little beginnings of them—welling into her eyes.



She turned from him, opened the back door and went out into the yard.

He sprang up and followed her.

Just outside the door, by the corner of the shed where was piled the rest of their fuel, she stood, drying her eyes with the corner of her apron. "It's all right," she said without looking at him. "I'm a silly fool."

He took her by the elbow. "Phil! Sit down. Here by me. Now, tell me!"

She turned upon him a wry face, forehead wrinkled, eyes humid with trouble, a crooked smile on her lips. "No. It doesn't matter—ever—money doesn't. Not any more than your spinal column."

Brawn was still holding her elbow, looking into her face. A cold premonition came to him that perhaps she might take up his reckless offer. "Now, what's wrong?"

She shook her head vigorously. "Nothing."

"But there is." He knew pretty well what it was.

"No there isn't. Nothing. Nothing you can help. Nothing I can help." She paused.

"Well?"

"It's nothing, I tell you. Mama just said maybe she'd have to come out, that's all. She not getting what she expected—from Arthur."

Brawn was cold. "Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. She's vague about it. Maybe Arthur hasn't got it. She didn't say."

He got up and leaned against the corner of the shed. The old story was bobbing up again; now he would hear all about it. But there was trouble enough without this mangy old skeleton coming out of his

closet and rattling his bones. It wasn't that Arthur Coleman hadn't the money. Oh, no, he knew better than that. It was just that Arthur wouldn't let them "put anything over" on him. He was just sticking up his backbone and no one could say anything because most probably the "shoe fitted the other foot." And now the old lady was casting out her hints to come to Colorado. Slim chance he would have to get well if she did. He smiled inwardly with bitterness. She would surely have to be hard up to come to a place like this for solace and shelter.

He caught a look at Phyllida. She was inspecting the water pipe that came out under the house from the spring up the hill. A faint residue of suds was still adhering to her arm. Just a little grossness, maybe—one could and should overlook it. Blood was thicker than water; one could not forego heredity entirely—— He was fiercely resentful of a sudden—sorry it should be so.

Phyllida was standing by the doorpost, brushing off her hands. "Well, it's time to eat again. Always time to eat. What do you want, Job? Coming in?"

"Think I'll stay out here a while longer," said Brawn.

She left him and he sat down on the steps and gazed off eastward across the meadow. Slowly a sordid spell began to settle upon the world, bathed in its unwinking sunshine. Not a sound came to break the silence; trees, shrubs, and massive piles of rock stood watching—stolid—impervious to feeling.

He ought to do something, he supposed. But what? There was nothing he could do; he was a "flat tire." But he couldn't sit and mope and let her

feel that it was getting under his skin. She didn't know he knew—— Perhaps if he went to the village

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He raised his head; he spoke to her through the screen that intervened:

“I wonder—has Piggott got a machine, do you know, Phil?”

## CHAPTER XXV

**I**N MAY came Lieutenant Scholtz.

"I remember Mrs. Brawn," he said with a stiff little bow as Brawn introduced him.

"And what can be bringing you to this part of the world?" asked Phyllida.

Scholtz looked at her calmly and then around all about him, at the cottage and the landscape. "Seems to me like a pretty good place to be," he decided.

Phyllida laughed. "Oh, it's all right to-day, but to-morrow there may be two feet of snow. I don't know what they have done to spring—it's either winter or summer here." Brawn looked at her; she seemed to be fluttering. Her hair was in disorder and he noticed that she had been using some more of that tinted powder.

"You're still in, Scholtz? How does that happen?" he said.

"Yes," contributed Phyllida, tucking in a wisp of hair, "we saw you from the road. I was wondering what a uniform was doing out this way. Thought maybe it was some one after John. Won't you come in?" They were all standing in a little cluster near the door.

"I get out next month," replied Scholtz. "No, thank you. Just sit here for a few minutes. Pretty view you have here." His gaze would come back to



Phyllida though he addressed most of his remarks to Brawn. His smooth pink face was without a wrinkle; there was a ponderousness about the fall of his cheeks.

"Won't you stay to lunch, Mr. Scholtz?" put in Phyllida.

"What's the latest bicker?" asked Brawn.

Scholtz looked from Phyllida to Brawn and then to Phyllida again. "Why, thanks, no," he replied. "I must be getting back. I came with a party in a car and they're going back at two." They had taken chairs on the screened porch and Scholtz's gaze wandered to the inescapable panorama of the range. "Pretty fine place to live. Been here ever since you left the hospital?"

Brawn waited for Phyllida; Phyllida for Brawn.

"Have you any letters from the new organization?"

"No," said Brawn. "Which one?"

"We've been organizing to get a bill passed granting the emergency officers retirement on the same basis as they give it to the regular army. It'll cost you five dollars a year."

"What's the money for?"

Scholtz's mild blue eyes rested on Brawn in surprise. "Why, you can't get a bill passed through Congress without money even if it's a good one. It has been estimated it will cost about ten thousand dollars to get this bill passed. We are arranging to have a circular mailing system of about fifty thousand letters a week to Congress from all over the country. We have seventy-eight Congressmen pledged now. Better let me take your subscription in."

"But," said Brawn. "I'm not sure I'm in favour of it. Especially getting in that way."

"Why not? We can't get it any other. We did as much as the regular army officers. We should be treated the same way, seems to me." He looked again at Phyllida.

Brawn was feeling stubborn; Scholtz had never appealed to him as a man of ideas. "Well," he replied, "there is some difference. We have been used to other things. We can make a living in other ways. The regular army officer cannot. He's spoiled for real work, he's done so much gold-bricking all his life."

"How much do you think you can do now?" Scholtz suddenly turned on him.

"Not much," Brawn admitted.

"Well, then. Your hundred and fifty-seven fifty does not go very far. And they can take it away from you any time they feel like doing it. You don't get very far on that, do you?"

Brawn looked at Phyllida. "That wouldn't be so bad," he admitted after a bit, "but I don't get that much."

Scholtz's round face showed mild surprise. "You don't get your insurance? What's the reason you don't?"

"Well," said Brawn. "I have been examined. I don't rate that much, I reckon. Haven't enough activity."

Scholtz seemed aghast. He shook his head solemnly:

"Now listen. To-night you write to your Congressman. Tell him how bad you are off. And write to all your influential friends, especially those in politics and those with money, and get them to write to your Congressman. Tell them you cannot live on your compen-

sation—you get total temporary, did you say?—and that you can't work—the army doctors have told you you can't work—and ask him to use his influence in getting your insurance awarded to you. And keep on bothering him until you hear from him." Scholtz paused for breath and gazed fiercely and earnestly at Brawn. "Why, I got mine eight months ago."

Phyllida seemed interested. "Why don't you, Job?"

"Because," said Brawn, suddenly irritated, "I don't believe in that sort of thing. I went in the war for something else, not for what I could get out of it. And I'm not going to ask Congress or anybody else to support me. I'll not be made a beggar of."

"What you could *get* out of it?" Phyllida repeated eagerly. "Yes. Look what you *got* out of it. I'm with Lieutenant Scholtz. You're entitled to as much as the most. The Government has no way of knowing. They'll never give unless they're made to."

"Now, Phil!"

"I imagine I have some say in the matter. They've wrecked my apple cart as well as yours." She paused and then looked confused.

"Well," retorted Brawn stubbornly, "it's not according to my principles. And principles is about all I've got left."

For a moment all three sat in silence, gazing at the floor. More feeling had crept into the discussion than any one had intended should.

"Come, Lieutenant Scholtz. Let me show you the house. You might decide to come up this way this summer and you can see what to expect. Coming, Job?"

Scholtz rose and followed her into the house.



Brawn remained sitting in his chair. For a little while he could hear their voices in casual conversation. And then the sound stopped. They had probably gone out the back door and Phyllida was in all likelihood showing him the pantry and the wood-shed and the barn. A sudden aversion to Scholtz and his kind arose in him and rankled. Self! Self! Self! Ninety per cent. of the world was interested solely in what it could get out of life, by any means that would be tolerated. The War Risk Insurance had established ratings for the various cases of disability, he knew. And while it had shown gross incompetence in meeting the issues fairly and squarely, still to go beyond it savoured of lawbreaking, bribery. There was a bitterness in his virtue.

In a few minutes Phyllida and Scholtz returned, and while they said nothing as they came upon the porch, he knew that they had been discussing him and his compensation.

"Well," said Scholtz, picking up his hat. "I'm glad I found you people at home."

Phyllida laughed sharply—she was certainly getting the flutters here lately, Brawn thought—"Fat chance of finding us anywhere else, Mr. Scholtz."

They walked with him to the gate. Far down the road rose the dust of an automobile which must have passed the house some minutes before. It was an unusual sight.

"Aren't you afraid to walk that distance?" said Brawn.

Scholtz drew himself up. "Little walks like that do us good every now and then. Do *you* good. Work up an appetite."

Brawn was on the point of retorting, of referring



to Scholtz's award of insurance, but he held his tongue.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Brawn." And then to Brawn: "Better do what I told you. Get your friends to write your Congressman. They can't resist pressure like that."

They watched him go down the road. The sun was almost directly overhead and Brawn was thinking it might be a pretty hot walk for Scholtz in spite of his strength and his insurance award.

Phyllida turned to him and looked him in the eyes. "Why didn't you give him the five dollars?"

He was at once tremendously angry—people forcing him like that. "It's movements of that sort that have prostituted our American institutions," he said. "We elect our representatives to make our laws—not to put them over by propaganda."

"You sound like a Fourth of July oration," she laughed bitterly. "If they haven't got sense enough to provide the proper laws to run the country, there surely isn't any harm in clubbing together and telling them what to do—what they ought to know without being told. You know we could use more." She started walking toward the house.

He turned and followed her. "Just the same it savours of bribery—all this clubbing together of common selfish interest and forcing it across with a slush fund. Besides," he added, "I didn't have the five."

She made no further reply and he followed her slowly. She was looking a bit thin, he thought, especially in the neck; the tendons were thin and drawn. Her petticoat was showing. It had been a hard winter on both of them.

Scholtz had not mentioned the hospital. That had

been unusual. But nevertheless it was the hospital that Brawn thought of all day. By degrees a depression settled upon him. What if some day he should have to go back? He had no money to go anywhere else. Phyllida as much as admitted that the strain of making both ends meet was very great. And on the first of June the rent would go up to fifty dollars a month. Just what would happen if they started running into debt?

In the middle of the afternoon he walked out under the trees and sat down on a carpet of pine needles and let the sun beat down on his back. It was a lazy, soft sensation and the smell of the sap came clear and distinct to his nostrils. Back in the kitchen Phyllida began to sing, short little spasmodic bursts of song. Phyllida sang through her nose and her high notes were always a bit thin. But it had been a long time since he had heard her. Now there was sunlight—a warm breeze—sap starting—the sharp blue sky.

He turned and lay face down upon the ground, with the needles pressing against his cheek. His heart ached from anxiety and why it should—at this particular time—he could not explain to himself. Things were no worse than they had been and summer was at hand. It was Scholtz—Scholtz with the poisonous suggestions of disability, of hospital and doctors, of laws and ratings and restrictions. Scholtz had done it. He would have to go back, perhaps. The grim, gray gates would yawn for him once more. “Once you come back for a second time,” he had heard some one say, “you never leave.”

That night he dreamed of the Louisville Country

Club. He and Mrs. Crane were having a foot race across the lawn in front of the porch. And as he ran—Mrs. Crane held her skirts up above her knees and her fat legs were very bowed—some one kept crossing in front of him, across his path. He reached out his hand. It proved to be Phyllida, all thin and pale and sour-faced and in a perfect rag bag of a dress. And he had to stop and remonstrate with her and she stood and stared at him with the oddest expression in her eyes while Mrs. Crane called to him from the pop-corn stand and wildly waved her handkerchief.

Then one day a big red tourist automobile passed the house. There were only a few passengers and they were pretty well bundled up. As they passed they all looked in and a man pointed out the house to his wife and there was a great fluttering of veils and scarves and a little girl waved her handkerchief to Brawn, who sat still under his pine tree. And then he wished he were going with them. But he had no money. He wondered how long things could keep up this way. Could they last out the summer? He hoped that they would not have to give up before the summer was over. Perhaps he might get something to do in the village, now that the tourist season had begun. But no; he was not good for anything. They might as well take him back to the hospital. That was what the hospital was for—to keep ex-service men from dying on the street. And he would get a number again and his t. b. would get a rating. He would have just so much involvement on a chart. And the degree of his sickness would depend on how far down those little red lines extended on the picture. It was all Scholtz's fault. If he had not come he would have forgotten all



about such things. If only he could see some people from a real man's world! People who were not thinking about their health or pensions from the Government—useful, agreeable, happy people. It was the tourist auto, too, that was partly to blame.

"Phil," he said that day at noon, "when the season opens, I want you to go to the village more. Meet a few people. Sometimes they have dances at the hotels. You might as well be getting something out of living in a resort. I want you to."

She had not looked up when he began but gradually that odd, quizzical look which had been so characteristic of her came into her face. "What's on your mind, Job? Thinking of starting up a local charity—tin cup, bell, and everything?" She was thoughtful a moment. "Might not be so bad at that. They tell me the favourite local sport is swatting the tourist."

He grinned. "No. I mean it. Winter's over. It's time you were having a spring thaw. I've been a—a pretty hard proposition. I mean it. I want you to have some fun."

"Thank you, Job," she said gravely. And then with a twinkle: "I'm an obedient soul. I'll go as far as you say. Better not get me started."

He breathed a sigh of relief. Somehow a tension seemed to have lightened. "Just saw a tourist car pass the house again this morning. Things make me restless."

That afternoon they sat on their porch with the sunlight streaming all about them. Up the cañon to the southwest the mists were gathering and clouds were hovering about the sugar-loaf peak that stood at the end of the gorge. Phyllida had taken to her knit-



ting again—to sitting with Brawn on the porch in the sunlight. After all, the place had prospects.

A little ball of dust appeared down the road, followed by a tail like a comet. And then a small automobile came bumping around the curve. Brawn watched it approach, wondered where it might be bound for. And then it was stopping at the gate. A man got out, swung back the gate, jumped into the car again and drove slowly down the soft dirt driveway toward them. The man held out his arm from the shadow of the top, in greeting. Phyllida had dropped her knitting in her lap. "Who is it, do you suppose?" she said to Brawn.

A voice called out, "Hi, there!" from the car and then Brawn rose slowly to his feet.

"It's—it's Cloud. Jerry Cloud. What do you suppose——"

The car came to the end of the driveway and the man jumped out and came toward them, grinning. "They told me it was the last house on the road," he said. "They meant the last house in the world, didn't they? Hello, Phil. How are you, Brawn?"

They opened the screen door and went down the steps to meet him. Brawn felt an indescribable friendliness at the sight of his familiar face. Then all three began to speak at once: "Why, Jerry!"—— "You don't look sick, Brawn!"—— "What are you doing out in this part of the world?"

Then all three took seats on the porch and Cloud sank back in his chair and sighed deeply and smiled. "That damn flivver's paralyzed me. Great view you have here."

Phyllida's eyes were alight with excitement. "But

tell me, Jerry. Tell me right away what on earth are you doing in Colorado and with a flivver?"

Cloud turned away from the range and grinned at her. He looked her over comprehensively—from head to foot. "That's easy," he explained. "Well, I had to get to work. So I came as far away from home as I could to avoid the stigma. You see, I don't mind you people."

"What are you doing, Jerry?"

He paused as if hesitating to tell them. And then he laughed. "I'm selling soap. Toilet soap. I've all this territory—Rocky Mountain district."

"But, Jerry, I didn't know you were so well-informed on soap. I didn't know you had it in you. Your light's been under a bushel."

"And now it's in a soap dish. You don't look as if you were sick, Brawn. Somebody told me back home you were about to cash."

"Do I look it?" Brawn laughed shortly.

"Jerry!" said Phyllida. "You're staying to supper?"

"Sure," said Cloud. "Worse than that. All night if you've got the room. If you've got a big, soft cushion I'll sit on it and you can put me anywhere. I can't get back in that car to-night."

The afternoon passed quickly away. The sun sank toward the jagged saw-tooth horizon, shooting out its golden rays like arrows against the shadows that pursued it from the eastern ridge. In the southwest the mists and gathering clouds hung waiting in the valley, seemingly not yet determined on action, like scavengers lurking on the out-skirts of a deserted campfire.

"You'd better come inside. It gets cold the minute the sun goes down," said Phyllida, gathering up her knitting from her lap and going indoors.

"But I thought you had gone across the border and enlisted in the Canadian army," said Brawn.

"Hell, no," replied Cloud, rising to his feet. "Where'd you ever get that idea? I was in the motor transport. Camp Lewis. Can I help you, Phil? Lemme make you some biscuits. There's class to my cooking."

Phyllida's reply was unintelligible.

"Huh," called Cloud. And then he went indoors.

Brawn sat and wondered. But already he was more cheerful. Jerry Cloud brought up a host of pleasant memories. "It's what I need—above all else," he thought. And just then the sun dipped and the air was cold and the mists and clouds to the southwest seemed to come a little nearer.

He went indoors.

It was very cheery that night sitting by lamplight about the little sheet-iron drum. It was the same drum that had so miserably fallen down in the cold snaps, but it roared confidently away so that they had to move back their chairs after a while.

"I can't get over your being here, Jerry. You of all people. I always thought you'd be bored to death before you ever reached manhood and here you are doing the most obvious thing in a clean, pure world. Why didn't you try matches, Jerry?"

"Oh, it's not so bad," said Cloud. "You see, my uncle died and he didn't have anything after all. I got this job back in Louisville and I've made a pretty good thing out of it. I'm not such a dumbbell after



all, Phil. You'd be surprised how much I'm making out of it—soap. And I'm just getting in with the trade. If things break right, I'll be opening up a Denver office and putting men out on the road." He breathed deeply, his eyes fixed on some visionary prospect, and settled into his chair.

Brawn had not been included much in the conversation, which instinctively would lapse to personal levels. And it seemed a bit queer sitting up there and listening to Jerry Cloud's prospects of profitably lathering the Rocky Mountain region and not feeling the least bit of irritation or jealousy. But Brawn had no knowledge of soap nor the psychology of salesmanship which Jerry flourished in his tales of recent triumphs. He had never considered the problem of enforcing his own personality though that was obviously the thing to do these days. On the contrary it seemed to him that Jerry had slumped in his transition from potential social bandit to petty salesman. He had lifted his leopard skin and showed himself to be bourgeois sheep. And the peculiar thing was that he obviously enjoyed the natural rôle. Brawn wondered that he had ever been jealous.

At length the little clock tinkled out eleven and Phyllida got up. "Three blankets will be all you can have, Jerry," she said.

He followed her and stood in the doorway leaning upon the doorpost while she made his bed for him in the spare room. "What I need is a cushion," he insisted. Like most alleged humourists he parted with a potent idea with the utmost reluctance. "By the way, Phil. In about two weeks I'll be coming back this way from Wyoming. Think I'll stop off for a



week end. The hotels will be open then and we can throw a party, maybe."

"That'll be fine," said Phyllida. Then she came brushing past him, a pile of clean linen over her arm. "Come, Job. You're next."

It amused Brawn, the fuss she was making. But he went lightheartedly to bed. For a short while he heard Phyllida and Cloud talking to each other through thin partitions—trifling inanities. But the sound was cheerful. He went to sleep with their voices echoing faintly in his ears.

When he awoke, snow covered the ground.

Jerry came into the living room, collarless and rubbing his hands and breathing noisily through his nose. He looked scrawnier than Brawn had imagined he could look. But then his hair was dishevelled. It suddenly occurred to Brawn that that was what was the matter with him.

They had a huddled breakfast of coffee and toast and at eight-thirty Cloud bundled himself into an overcoat.

"I've some yarn mitts, Jerry," said Brawn. "I'm not going to use them any more. They'll be just the thing for driving." He went into his room and rummaged about for them in his army locker. When he returned, Phyllida and Cloud were standing together in the front doorway. Cloud was talking in a low tone and at the same time he was fingering the tie which she had knotted in her middy blouse.

"You're welcome to these," said Brawn, tossing the gloves on the table.

Cloud looked once more at Phyllida, thoughtfully, and then turned to Brawn. "Good-bye," he said, hold-

ing out his hand. "Glad to see you looking so well." He picked up the gloves and turned to Phyllida. "I'll drop you a card in a week or two. It's a go—the party and the week-end?—I'm apt to be dropping in on you every now and then this summer."

"I wish you would," they both said together.

They watched his runabout back around and turn and then head for the gate. Then Cloud stuck out his hand in farewell and directly he was rolling out the gate on to the road. He did not stop, but left the gate standing open. The tracks of his auto were sharp and black in the thin feathery snow.

"You can tell he was raised in the city," laughed Brawn.

"All the same I'm glad he came," said Phyllida.

"So am I," replied Brawn.

## CHAPTER XXVI

**J**ERRY CLOUD did not return in two weeks. And it was Brawn who expressed his disappointment. "I don't suppose he'll show up," he said. And then later: "Wish we were five or six hundred miles nearer the States. People might drop in on us then."

Near the end of June, Phyllida got the post card. "I'll be with you over the Fourth. Get your hair braided. Business is fine." And Brawn smiled as she read it to him: "Funny how much respect Jerry has for money now. When he had none of it he scorned it. Nothing like experience."

To which Phyllida made no reply.

Early Friday afternoon of July the second the abbreviated automobile came bumping around the curve from the sign-post pine tree and stopped before the swinging gate. And Jerry Cloud jumped out. Phyllida and Brawn watched him come slowly down the driveway.

"I thought you had forgotten us," said Phyllida.

Cloud was smiling. He had donned a loud checked golf suit with heather golf stockings and his face was fiery red from the unadulterated sunlight. He had been driving about with his top down. He was smiling broadly as he sprang up the steps.

"Not a chance," he said. He put his arm about Phyllida's shoulders and held out his hand to Brawn. He seemed pleased with some picture that lay before his mind. "Had a great month. This country is ripe for the picking. Why, you'd be surprised how they fall for my line. The week of June tenth—that was the week after I left here?"—looking at Brawn—"I sold—let me see: Four ninety-five and sixty eight——"

"Come on in Jerry. I'll get you pencil and paper," interrupted Phyllida.

"Yeah. Tell us where you're going. Not where you've been," added Brawn. There was gaiety in the tone of both.

Cloud dismissed the rosy mental image and grinned. "All right. I was coming to that." He sat down in a porch chair and crossed his legs, conscious of the curve of his stocking which he regarded reflectively. "There's a dance at the Westmore to-night and you're both going. Bunch of people came up from Denver today. Lots of them from the East. I'll bet four bits loads passed me on the way up the cañon."

"I didn't think anything could pass that car of yours, Jerry," laughed Phyllida.

Brawn looked thoughtful and Phyllida went on: "I think that would be lovely. I've got an old frock from back in the dark ages and my slippers are very decrepit. But think of going to a dance again, Job."

"Huh?" Brawn started. "Yes," he replied thoughtfully. "It would be nice—but—I don't know. I reckon I'd better not. I'm afraid——"

"What?" interrupted Cloud. "Why, you're crazy. I'd not hurt you. Do you good. We'll drive down in the flivver——"



"That's the point," laughed Brawn shortly. "That bus of yours would jar loose all my fibrosis."

"What's fibrosis? Well, if you're particular we can get a service car—I can get one. And you can sit in the corner of the dance hall and watch your wife go get 'em."

The light was fading from Phyllida's face. "No," she said at length. "I guess we'd better not, Jerry. But it's sweet of you to think of it. Job's getting on so well I'd hate like everything to give him a set-back. Especially after all we've done to get him on his feet."

"Doesn't look to me there's anything the matter with him," said Cloud.

"You can't tell by the looks, Cloud." Brawn caught a quick glance at Phyllida. "There's no reason," he began slowly, "that you can't go, Phil. Jerry'd just as soon take you without me."

"Rather. But—why, it's not going to hurt you. Sit up in the corner. Nobody's going to ask *you* to dance." His words, Brawn felt, did not conscientiously express his desires.

"No," broke in Phyllida. "It's settled. And now let's enjoy ourselves. Jerry, what do you want us to do to entertain you? The week-end has begun."

They all stood up as if in obedience to her wishes and then no one knew what to suggest.

"Let's go down and look at the chickens," said Brawn.

"No. Jerry doesn't care anything about chickens, do you, Jerry? At least, not any longer. And there isn't but one *chickens*. Poor old lonesome thing. Let's go down in the pine grove and watch the squirrels. What do you say, Jerry?"

"Why, we could go for a hike—off the road yonder where that line of trees comes down." He hesitated. "I wish—I wish old Brawn could walk a little."

Brawn stiffened. "Say," he said brightly, "don't you mind me. Go ahead with your hike—you and Phil. I don't care anything about it. I've got a good book here I want to get to. You go ahead. It's time Phil was seeing some of this country."

Phyllida laughed. "What's the book, Job? The one on Parlour Etiquette? Come on, Jerry. We'll all go down in the grove."

And so it was decided. And they slowly walked across the grass, cushions and blankets over arms, pausing every now and then to comment on a badger hole or a wild geranium bush, Jerry Cloud wrapped in rosy visions of a soap-inspired prosperity, Brawn holding himself in pity.

By the side of a huge fallen tree Phyllida spread her blanket. "If you had only brought your book, Job, you might read to us," she twinkled at him maliciously.

"Listen," replied Brawn. "You two needn't sit around here just because I'm here. I don't have to be watched. Why don't you take Phil across there to that old windmill, Cloud? Or is it a windmill?"

"Huh? Suits me."

"You two quit bothering yourselves about my entertainment," said Phyllida. "Here's where we sit." And she plumped herself down on a pillow.

The men slowly followed suit. Cloud stretched himself down at full length, his head and shoulders on the blanket, his feet out amongst the pine cones and needles. And almost immediately he went to sleep.

Phyllida was on the point of breaking a long silence by addressing a remark to him when he began to snore. It was a soft, contented little snore, inspired no doubt by the sunlight and the faint aromatic odour and the popularity of his soap. Phyllida looked at Brawn and smiled.

The wind came in long rustling sweeps through the tree tops and far above them a hawk was circling in great lazy arcs, now a black dot against the deep blue of the sky, now flashing across a fleecy cloud, a crazy, wild, wind-tossed thing. A little patch of pale lavender-coloured flowers were gently moving their heads, sending off an elusive, wild scent, and in a clump of aspens a flock of tiny birds were chattering. It was a silly, futile sound for all that vast, wind-swept, cloud-shadowed amphitheatre—a trivial sound that one might put aside with his hand, seeking the clouds and the blue sky in his desires, and the hawk in his tremendous circles.

It was the first time that Brawn had been so far afield. He leaned his head against the huge bole and closed his eyes. And to his senses, thus the more acute, came the whispering suggestion of utter freedom. It was as though his soul and mind, twisted together into one hard little knot of pettinesses, were torn apart and sent streaming and free in the sunlight and the wind. Faintly to his ears came a far-off eerie whistle, piercing the clouds. He opened his eyes and looked at Phyllida. And she, catching the question in his face, shook her head and smiled. It was a wistful smile.

"Phil," he whispered, "you go with Jerry. Hear me? I want you to."

She said nothing. And they sat and watched the sky



and listened to the wind in the tree tops and Jerry's gentle rasping. The sun passed behind a cloud and at once the air grew chill; the sweep of the meadow to the mountain edge a sombre shadow.

"Phil," said Brawn again. "You must go. What'll we do with him—if you don't?" with a motion of the head toward Cloud.

She shrugged her shoulders. And then Jerry moved, drew one foot up under him off the needle carpet, and awakened. He sat up, blinked and shivered. "Gee! Thought it was snowing. Great old place you've got here, Brawn."

The other two laughed. . . . .

They went to the dance—Phyllida and Cloud. It was decided in the kitchen over the cooking supper. At the table they sat in the candlelight—the Brawns always dined in candlelight when they had company—and every one was cheerful and jolly. "I'll be sore if you don't, Phil," Brawn had said, and the others had not offered much opposition. They talked for a few minutes of old times and parties. And they laughed and seemed to think many things foolish and immature which in the old days carried the weight of grave importance. "I remember one night," said Brawn, "when I met you, Jerry, in the rain. I was coming from Phil's—why, I believe it was the night I sold it to her. I believe it was. And you were all wet and soaked with the rain. And we were about as glad to see each other as two cats over a line." Brawn laughed. "I used to be jealous of you, Jerry, though what about, I can't imagine." He paused a moment. "I a—I even imagined you were on your way to Phil's that night," he chuckled to himself.



Phyllida looked thoughtful. And then she looked at Cloud. "Why, you were, weren't you, Jerry? That was the night——"

"Was I?" said Cloud. "I don't remember."

"Why, yes. Your uncle had just died and you couldn't borrow any money. And you came to tell me all about it."

Cloud looked at the ceiling blankly.

"You didn't tell me about it, Phil," said Brawn.

"No. Of course not. It wasn't any of your business. It was Jerry's."

They got ready for the dance. Cloud brushed his teeth and combed his hair—until it was sleek and shiny. And then Phyllida came from her room. She stood in the doorway in her filmy dress of sea-foam green, in her white kid slippers, with her white arms bare and slender fingers clutching the folds of her skirts. In the shadowy doorway, in the faint yellow candlelight flickering circles on the low ceiling, she looked like a bit of dream mist, a creature fashioned out of the fabric of memories—so slender she was, and fair.

"How do I look?" she said.

"Great!" said Cloud. And she came and joined them.

Brawn listened to the sputter of the motor as they rolled up to the gate. Then he heard the gate scream and drag on the sandy ground. Faintly he heard Cloud's voice and then the sputter of the motor again, the grind of wheels, and then it all died away into the distance. He was glad Phyllida was going to have a good time.

For a short while he dozed, aware of the black, box-like little room, the rather stuffy smell of hot pine

boards cooling, with just the rim of his consciousness. And then something came and brushed against the screen in his window. That in itself would have been unimportant. But then the thing uttered a soft, plaintive cry. He heard it dimly in his dream and fashioned something of it. The cry came again, louder and more persistent and again the scraping against the screen. Brawn wakened suddenly and lay, staring at the ceiling. Black darkness crowded down all about him and the night air was very chill, sweeping across his bed through the window. Something in the dream had shaken his composure though he had forgotten it immediately.

There it was again, scraping against the window screen. He raised himself in bed and saw a shadow outlined in the lower black square. It was moving and he could hear the soft grating as it moved and a curious, low, sputtering noise. Like a flash it occurred to him it was like the purring of a cat.

He lay quite still. He wondered what he should do, coming gradually into full consciousness—a consciousness that took cognizance of the darkness and the silence and the cold. He was alone. And there was a creature there beyond his window, separated from him by a piece of wire netting. It could easily burst through—into the room, though now it was merely pressing against the screen, muttering to itself. He had heard of lynxes and bob-cats and mountain lions. In the rocks were coyotes and Phyllida had seen the tracks of deer. That thing, standing there—what was it?

He lay motionless, watching. He began to plan. Some creature, lured thither by the smell of food, was

at his window—just what it was he did not know, though the purring could only mean—— He felt a curious thrill at the thought. He was alone. There was no one he could call on. And there was only a fragile screen between.

He suddenly remembered that in the corner by his bed there was an old alpenstock. It was like a walking stick with a curved handle, only at the tip there was a long pointed ferrule of heavy metal for striking into the ground. It had been in that corner ever since they had moved into the cottage. That is—if Phyllida had not moved it. He stretched back his hand and groped along the wall. For a moment he thought it was gone as he leaned softly out of bed reaching into the corner, his eyes fixed on the window. And there came a gleam, a green, phosphorescent gleam from the window and he knew that he was being watched. The scraping sound had ceased.

His fingers touched a round hard object; he grasped the handle that was like a cane's. And then, softly, hardly daring to breathe and moving so slowly that it was almost imperceptible even to himself, he drew his weapon to him and raised it in the air. Slowly he drew his feet up under him and all the time those two green spots regarded him, motionless. He poised himself for a moment and then with all his strength launched the weapon forward, holding it like a spear, with the weight of his body behind it. There was a ripping sound and then the feel of something soft and a cry. And without stopping to investigate the success of his stroke, Brawn sprang from his bed and across the floor through the door which he slammed behind him into the living room. There was a Colt automatic in



the desk drawer, also a pocket flashlight. These two indispensable articles had come early into his mind. He found them quickly. And then—to rid the place of the danger that threatened—Brawn softly stepped across the floor and, pistol in hand, pushed open the door, an inch at a time.

There was not a sound. He switched on the flashlight and sprayed it across the floor. There was nothing unless the bed might be concealing something beneath it. Against the window sill lay the alpenstock; the screen had been pushed from its place by the force of the blow, evidently, for there was the black, cold square of the open window. Brawn paused a moment and then sprang in and pulled down the sash. A wild creature would hesitate to jump through a pane of glass, he thought. And then he picked up the stick and held it in the light. There was a tiny bit of fur sticking to it—but that was all.

He stood in the dark in indecision. For a moment he thought he might sleep in one of the other rooms. But they would be no better than this one. So he closed the other window and got back into bed. His gun he slipped under the pillow where he could touch it by merely moving his hand. And then he looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock.

Of course it was not possible for him to go to sleep. He would lie awake until Cloud and Phyllida returned and he would tell them about it. And in the morning they would go and look for the animal. There might be some signs of it, though he doubted that he had really killed it. There had been no blood on the ferule.

The room began to feel stuffy. Faint sounds from



the outdoors came to him muffled and indistinct. He had chilled himself in those few moments of action. And he wondered if he had done himself any harm lunging forward that way with the cane. He felt his pulse. It was hammering away at a great rate—probably one hundred and twenty to the minute.

For a long time he lay, listening. A slight nausea took hold of him and there was a throbbing in his temples. He looked at his watch again. It was a quarter after twelve. He would have to wait another hour, he supposed. He hoped that they would come soon so that he could give Cloud the gun and Cloud could look around the house and see if that creature was gone.

At one o'clock the world was just as still as ever, with only occasional stirrings of the wind in the aspens against the house. At half past one the nausea had begun to subside and his pulse had slowed down a bit, too, he thought. He looked at his watch no more.

There was a drumming in his ear. He tried to shake the sound off but it persisted. He awoke. He sat up in bed. A reddish, pearly light came through the window and the insistent thrumming, if anything, seemed louder on his wall. It was a woodpecker come early, hunting for grubs in the dry, bark coating of his cabin. It was morning. Now he could find what had been visiting him the night before.

He slid his feet out on to the floor and felt for his slippers. He wondered when Phyllida and Cloud could have come in; he had not heard them. As he stood up a vast dizziness came over him and that gripping nausea, so he stood perfectly still and directly

the feeling passed. He walked to the door, opened it and looked through. Phyllida's long coat hung over a chair. On the table lay Jerry's hat.

Quietly he dressed himself and then opened the front door and went outside. He came to the dislocated screen lying on the grass. He picked it up. There was a little hole in the wire near the lower part of the frame. That was all. He looked about in the bushes but there was no sign of anything. He walked all around the house. It was just as any normal house should be: quiet and hollow-eyed and still.

He came and sat on the porch and watched the sunlight spread across the hills like a fan. Far off towered the peaks, lofty and cold and supreme in the dawn. His heart was still thumping and there was a hard lump in his throat as if he were going to be seasick. All this and the stillness. He knew he was going to be ill. But he would wait till they got up.

It was nearly ten o'clock when Phyllida's door opened. She came out on the porch and found Brawn sitting with his forehead in his hand. "Sorry I'm so late," she said. "Jerry up yet?"

"No."

"Oh—yum. Gee! But that was a good party. You ought to have come."

He did not reply, did not look up.

"Been up long? What do you want for breakfast? And we've got the niftiest little plan for you." She rubbed her eyes and stood yawning at the mountain range.

"Don't want anything."

"What's the matter?" She came and laid a hand on his shoulder. "Off your feed a little?"

"Had a narrow escape from being killed last night," he said, looking up at her solemn and gaunt-eyed.

"That's interesting," she yawned. "Listen, Job, there's some people at the Westmore—from Cleveland. Regular folks and they're going to——"

"'Sfact. Come over here and I'll show you." He got up and took her hand and drew her to the edge of the porch.

"But wait till I tell you. They've come out here in two cars and they're going on up to—— Wait a minute, Job, till I tell you all about it!"

"See, here's the screen. See the hole in it. There was some kind of animal on my window sill and I stabbed it with that pointed cane. Can't find it anywhere about the house. Maybe I didn't kill it."

Phyllida picked up the screen and put it back in place in the window. "Did you see it, Job?"

Jerry Cloud came around the corner of the house. "What's the row about?"

"Job's killed a mountain lion."

And then they both laughed.

"Go on. Laugh, both of you. Show your ignorance. I didn't say it was a mountain lion. I don't know what it was. I couldn't see it very well."

"What did it look like, Brawn?"

"Don't know. It had green eyes. It was too dark, and I didn't wait to see."

Cloud laughed. "Probably some old tomcat. What did you do? Spear him like a fish?"

"But let's not talk about the old cat," said Phyllida. "Listen, Job. I was telling him, Jerry, that the Sercombs asked us to go with them up to Grand Lake. This afternoon. They're leaving the village at two,



Job, and they've got room for three or four more. It's lovely up at Grand Lake and I know you'd enjoy it and the Sercombs knew old Mr. Hodges years ago."

"I don't want to go," said Brawn, shortly.

She took him by the arm. "You're hungry. Poor thing, he wants his breakfast." She started leading him around to the porch. "We'll talk about it at the table."

"I don't want any breakfast," said Brawn. He walked up the steps and across the porch and opened the door.

"Where're you going, Job?" Phyllida looked significantly at Cloud and smiled.

"To bed," said Brawn.

He heard the low hum of their voices as he closed his bedroom door behind him. Then he took off his clothes and crawled in. He was still a bit dizzy and there was a dull, gnawing ache in his stomach.

A short while later Phyllida came in with a tray. "Can't you eat a little something, Job? Maybe it would make you feel a little better."

"Had too much now," said Brawn, without opening his eyes.

She stood and regarded him, tray in her hand. "Don't you think you'd feel better if you did, Job?"

"No," he said, shortly. "Thank you."

The door closed.

He was no good. The least little thing "put him on the bum." If he had to depend on himself he would soon go to pieces. The slightest thing—chopping a little wood, walking a short distance for anything—would "put him on the bum." It was worse



than being dead. No one understood. The pain was tightening about his temples.

The door opened again. Phyllida stood before him—he gazed at her through the spread fingers of his hand which he held across his eyes. She had on her hat and coat and there was a look of grave concern on her face.

“Job,” she began softly, “I’m sorry. But I have to go to the village again. Jerry’ll take me and we’ll hurry back.” She paused and seemed undecided. “You don’t think you’d like to take that trip? It’s a big car. And the people are lovely people. Maybe it’d do you good.”

He raised up on one elbow. Why was it she wouldn’t understand? “I tell you, I can’t. I’m sick. Every time I move, my dinner comes up. And my head is aching fit to split. And I have a pain right here,” tapping his chest vaguely. “I’m no good, Phil,” he went on and his voice trembled. “I can’t do the least thing. I’m not any better than I was. I’m—I’m not going to get well.”

“Oh, that’s nonsense,” she said easily. “Well, I’ll have to go and tell Mrs. Sercomb. She was so lovely to me. Now quit your worrying about yourself.” She came and laid her hand on his head, a quick, fleeting touch. “We won’t be gone an hour.”

She had hardly gone when he regretted his refusal; it would have been very pleasant to meet some real people. He had not been away from the cottage since he first came into it nine months before. He heard the “flivver” climb the hill to the gate.

He became restless. He wished he had eaten something after all. Maybe the headache would leave if

he ate something. And it was a hideously quiet place with no one in it. He got up, put on his slippers and bath robe, and wandered out into the kitchen. He opened a box of crackers and ate one. He ate another. And another. Then he got himself a glass of milk. And then he felt better.

He walked out upon the porch again. It was selfish of him, perhaps, to keep Phyllida from going. But then for her to be gone two or three days—well, he couldn't get along.

The hour passed rather quickly; there was so much to consider. And directly Brawn saw them coming through the gate.

Phyllida came and took him by the shoulder. "I'm glad to see you're better, Job." Cloud hung about in the background. Somehow the look of solicitation on the faces of both of them irritated him more than would have complete disregard.

"Here's a letter for you." She tossed it into his lap. "The Sercombs were awfully sorry. They wanted to meet you."

Brawn opened the letter, scanned it, and then went suddenly cold.

"They said they would wait until three o'clock in case you should change your mind. Or in case I should decide to come without you," she laughed.

"Come on, Brawn," said Jerry, suddenly appearing in the foreground. "You've just got a bit of a grouch on. It's not going to hurt you?"

"Dammit," flared Brawn, "attend to your own business, will you?" He flourished the paper. "You don't know anything about it. And here this has come."

"What is it, Job?" Phyllida came and took the letter from him. "Why, it's nothing," she said in a moment. "Just an order for you to report for examination."

"Yes. And how am I going to comply with their unreasonable demands? That's a long trip—down to Denver."

"But it's not unreasonable, Job. You came up here."

"Yes. And think of the expense."

"They'll probably reimburse you. Don't get worked up over it, Job."

And then Cloud responded to an untimely impulse. "It's just what I told you, Brawn. You've stuck around here till you've got the jumps. Come on. Get your clothes on and come away and forget it."

Brawn felt a frantic desire to scream. But he fought it down. Above it all there hovered the image of a man in a long, white apron and a two-horned stethoscope. "Go away," he said with trembling voice. "Go away, you two, and leave me." And then with as much dignity as he could command he went into the house and again shut himself in his room.

It was no longer a matter of regret that he had refused the party. What were parties now? A thin, bony finger was beckoning him—it actually seemed so to him. They wanted to get hold of him again, to listen to those insidious little suggestive voices in his chest. They would be telling him he had to stay in the hospital. He was slowly getting worse. He was feeling worse now than he had at any time since he left the hospital. He knew just exactly what they would tell him. And he did not know what to make of



Phyllida. All of a sudden she seemed to draw away from him. She was no longer a refuge for him. She did not understand him, sympathize with him. It was quite likely she did not even care for him. After all, who should? He was just a drag. She was probably sticking to him out of a sense of duty. She was that kind. His thoughts were going round and round in a giddy whirl. Suddenly he took hold of himself. "This will never do. I'll be making a fool of myself," he thought.

He became calmer. And then he was overwhelmed with pity for himself. It was with difficulty that he held back the tears. A door closed and he became at once acute. He heard a whispering and then another door. He sprang up from the bed—he had not removed his bathrobe—and went to see what it was about. He looked out. He tried to make it as casual as possible.

His heart stopped in its beating. So—she *was* disobeying him—deliberately.

Phyllida stood by the front door, one hand on the knob, the other clutching Jerry's sleeve. She had on her hat and coat—her best ones—and at her feet sat her suit case. It was actually bulging. Her eyes, as Brawn entered, turned and looked into his and were wide and staring. Cloud—well, Cloud looked rather foolish, quite unnecessary.

Brawn started to speak. But he was trembling so that words would not come, would not wait for each other. "I just wanted to tell you," he addressed Phyllida and he tried to make his voice as airy and casual as possible. "You needn't take any trouble for decency's sake. It's gone too far for that."



Her lips parted but she said nothing. Only she stood there looking at him.

"Go on," he continued and his voice seemed to grow steadier and colder. "Go as far as you like." He waved his hand at the suit case. "You take a lot of trouble to land 'em—you and your mother. Though what you can have seen in me, I don't know. I turned out bad on you. And I don't blame you—you can't help what you inherit. I don't blame you except for your damn bad taste." He turned furiously on Cloud. "Take her," he said, "if you like—only don't you come back here again."

Then he turned and went back into his room.

Phyllida looked at Cloud and Cloud looked at Phyllida. Cloud's face was white. Then slowly they went out the door. He helped her into the car and then pushed the suit case under her feet.

"My God," he giggled nervously and then he started the car.

They passed out the gate without a word. This time Cloud remembered to shut it. He clambered in, threw in the foot pedal and moved up the throttle.

"The onery brute," he began after a moment—thoughtfully.

"Never mind, Jerry."

They were rolling past the single little outpost pine, and below them the meadow dipped and went waving across the valley, flecked with sun and shadow.

"What are you going to do, Phil? You can't stand for that sort of thing. Be a sport. Let's go to the houseparty anyway. He'll come around. I don't like to leave you—like this, Phil."

"I wonder what your idea of being a sport is, Jerry?"

They rounded a hill. They came in sight of Mr. Piggott's cabin nestling up in a gutter of rocks. Mr. Piggott himself, in shirt sleeves and bareheaded, stood with elbows on his gate. He waved at them as they passed.

Cloud caught a quick glance at Phyllida. She was biting her under lip and watching the road very closely. The suit case slid against his foot, impeding his movements and he gently pushed it away. It pressed against her foot and she looked down and seemed to see it for the first time. And then, deliberately, as though it were a matter of the greatest importance, she reached over, took it by the handle, lifted it and dropped it into the road.

Jerry slowed down the car and looked at her and then back at the road. The suit case lay on the red sand in the bright sunlight, a discarded, unwanted thing. It had broken open; the two halves lay spread out like an open book. And across the road lay scattered a great number of empty milk bottles, all alike. Two of them were rolling slowly to the side of the road.

"What did you do that for?" said Jerry.

She made no reply.

"I don't see why you were in such a hurry to take 'em back anyway, and now you've—— Well——"

"They were worth ten cents apiece at the store."

He turned and drove on.

After a while she spoke to him again. "Jerry," she said and her voice was soft. "I wonder if you'd mind—if you'd mind driving me down to Denver?"

“No. But why Denver?”

“I need reinforcements.”

“Huh? When d’you want to go?”

“Right now,” she said.

## CHAPTER XXVII

**J**OHN BRAWN stood at the window and watched the tourists. Every few minutes a car would pass, a big luxurious limousine or an obsequious, chattering "flivver," or one of the buses of the transfer company, long and flaming red, seating thirty passengers. Sometimes the sound of voices would come to him from the road—shrill, high-pitched, laughing voices. The sun was bright and the air was warm and the dust hung in a thin haze above the road.

The house seemed still and dark; the wide porch on the south side shut off the direct rays of the sun. It was also a bit chill. Brawn walked into his bedroom where his clothes were piled on a chair. Slowly he began to dress. Then he went to his dresser and opened a drawer. He took out some toilet articles and laid them on a towel. And then he wrapped the towel up in a newspaper and tied the bundle with a string.

He got his hat from a peg behind the front door, and with the package under his arm, he opened the front door and went out. The door did not close very easily; he had to slam it and the glass tinkled. There was no other sound so the noise of it was quite distinct.

Up the slight incline he walked in the brown dirt. He opened the gate, stepped out on to the road, and then closed the gate behind him. He could see the



chimney top of the house and one corner of the roof above the shoulder of the knoll. And then he turned away and walked on.

He stopped at Mr. Piggott's.

"Well," said Mr. Piggott, "I'm glad to see you're taking my advice. Get out and walk some. Makes your blood congeal."

"I wonder if you could take me down to Denver?" said Brawn.

Mr. Piggott showed mild surprise. "Why, I dunno. The Lizzie's not used to such a long trip. Shake you up pretty bad."

"That's all right," said Brawn. "I've got a message. Can't delay. I'll pay you the regular price."

Mr. Piggott hustled off to his stock yard. "Jest a jiffy. I'll have to fill her up and put some air in the tires. Dunno as how I might not like to go to the city myself. When'll you be comin' back?"

"I can't say," replied Brawn. "You needn't wait on me. It's government business."

"Oh," said Mr. Piggott, his eyes widening. . . .  
They were rolling down the road.

"I seen the Missus around noontime goin' toward the village with another feller."

"Yes. She's gone to a houseparty at Grand Lake."

"Grand Lake is a fine place."

"So I've heard," said Brawn.

At the village Brawn stopped and bought two ice cream cones. He was feeling hungry.

"These are sure tasty little fixins'," said Mr. Piggott.

As they struck the high road out of the village they met a stream of cars. They climbed the hill from the

valley and then took the downward slope. The road was very winding and at times quite steep. Mr. Piggott had to drive carefully, for at any turn in the road they were apt to meet another car.

"That's a fine woman of yours, Mr. Brawn."

"Yes."

"Most women who are hard enough to live out in a place like this all the year round lose their sweet lovin' ways."

"I suppose so."

"A good looker, too."

Brawn was silent.

"More of a talker than you."

Two hours later they rolled out of the cañon and the hills were left behind them. They struck off due east across a flat, dusty plain. On parallel roads they could see automobiles darting along in both directions. The sun was low in the sky.

Ten miles to the east they met another turnpike and from there on their way lay due south. "Denver road," said Mr. Piggott. "Think I'll stay over to-night and see a movie. They've some fine movies in Denver." And then again after a short pause: "Are you connected with the Government, Mr. Brawn?"

"I'm—what you might say tied to it. But it's not tied to me."

Mr. Piggott looked puzzled. "Reckon Uncle Sam's pretty independent to work for."

The sun dipped below the mountain rim. The sky was flaming red and the line of mountains was all dusky purple. Brawn was feeling stiff and tired. He had taken cognizance of every car that passed. Now it seemed that the traffic had ceased. Back in his

head had been hammering the thought that he would be missed, that his departure would cause some surprise. Besides this there was a feeling of disturbance, a dull, hurt feeling, a feeling of having been greatly wronged but of not caring greatly. And there was something dogged within him, pushing him on.

"Reckon I'd better stop and get some gasoline," said Mr. Piggott. "Didn't have much in my can when I loaded her up. I wouldn't want to get stuck on the road."

"There's a village on up ahead," said Brawn.

"Yes. Lafayette. They've got gasoline for sale there."

Twilight descended upon them as they rolled out upon the main street of Lafayette. About a block from the edge of town stood the white filling station, its glare already softened by the dusk. Another car of the same abbreviated style and shortness as their own stood at the pump.

They rolled up behind the other car. There was a woman sitting in it and the driver, a man, was standing on the driveway behind it, looking into the storage compartment, the compartment that looks like a beetle's back.

At the sight of them, Brawn's face went very white. He opened the door and stepped out upon the running board. "Here," said Mr. Piggott, "you needn't get out."

Brawn did not seem to hear him. He walked around the front of his car and touched the man on the shoulder. The man looked up. It was Jerry Cloud. His face had a blank, vague look.

"You lied to me," said Brawn. "Besides the other



things you did. I thought for a while you didn't have so much to do with it. But you made a mistake. I'm not sick enough for you to do all those things."

He struck Jerry Cloud between the eyes with his fist. Jerry reeled up against the queer-looking tool box of his car and some tools fell to the concrete pavement and tinkled musically. Jerry straightened up and was about to speak when Brawn struck him again, full upon the mouth, and then again. He rained blows upon him, for strangely enough the latter did not seem to know how to ward them off. With each blow Brawn would give that peculiar twisting movement of the wrist as his arm shot forward. They had taught him that in bayonet class in the army and he carried it out with mechanical, thoughtful precision. He was wondering when he should stop—his victim was so mute and unresisting—when Jerry sank to the pavement and lay huddled in a heap. He had not thought he was striking out that hard. The figure, too, seemed quite impersonal and all the anger seemed to go out of Brawn. And then he caught a glimpse of Phyllida's face. It was dim and white as through a veil.

He turned and walked back to his car. Mr. Piggott was leaning over, holding open the door for him and there was a very queer expression on his face. Brawn started to get in when there was a violent tickling in his throat. He coughed. But the tickling persisted and he coughed again. A paroxysm of coughing seized him; that catch in his throat would not go away. He felt dizzy and a little weak. And then there was something warm and salt tasting in his mouth. He spat. He raised his handkerchief and pressed it to



his mouth. He removed it and looked at it. It was soaked—dark red, with blood.

Again there was Mr. Piggott's face, looking so queerly. And the lights of the filling station came on and winked dizzily. Suddenly it began to get cold and Brawn looked at Mr. Piggott and smiled. Mr. Piggott did not know what he was smiling for.

"It's come," said Brawn to Mr. Piggott.

And then the lights began to go round and round and there was a blur of faces, white and very near, and the sound of voices. And then he knew no more.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

THE sunlight beat down upon the naked plain. As far as the eye could reach there was no shadow in which to hide. The earth was parched, the weeds were as in late autumn. Over to the west the clouds were massing, obscuring the mountains, great, white clouds with black centres, the sky by contrast at their edges the deepest blue.

Out of the distance a small dark spot was moving. It seemed to progress by agile darts and then again hover almost without motion, according as its trajectory intersected the line of vision. Behind it stretched a long, feathery tail, faintly vibrant, feebly imbued with life. A streak of bluish lightning forked in the heavens, contrasting strangely with the yellow glare of the foreground and beneath it sprang to life myriad dust clouds, tiny, frantic, yellow swirls that came rolling out upon the plain. They swept along until with a final spurt they vanished upward into nowhere and all was quiet again. On came the moving speck with the feathery tail and the sunlight beat down in a blinding glare. . . .

It was nearing noon and the air was dry and hot. The ambulance bumped along over the deep, hard ruts, *Bump—ump—ump—ump. Bump—ump.* John Brawn lay on his back and watched the ceiling, a

thing of ribs and canvas. Through the oblong opening of the doorway he could see the gathering clouds. He saw the lightning fork and the wind arise, sending the dust clouds scurrying. It was as if they were being pursued. Behind his head he could hear the low rasp of voices, of the driver and his helper.

The clouds were coming nearer; he could tell by measuring the intervening distance between their edge and the line of the door top. He wondered which would win: the ambulance or the storm. There came a bump, more violent than usual. Everything took on a vague ceilingward motion. The car stopped. He could hear a scraping against the curtain. Some one was getting out. A voice called from the road and in answer to it came the sudden shout of the driver: "Git me one, too, Ed," and then silence. For a few minutes all was quiet save for the sighing bursts of wind and a rustling as of tree tops in motion. The voice called again; there was a clumping sound of feet, the scrape of the curtains. "Y'owe me a dime," said a voice. The car started to roll along more slowly for a short distance. Once more it stopped. The curtain was lifted near Brawn's head; he was conscious of a staring pair of eyes, heard a thick, laboured breathing, and then the curtain dropped. "Aw ite," called a guttural voice.

Slowly they moved forward with a soft, grinding noise. Then through the oblong of the doorway Brawn caught sight of two, tall, gray columns of concrete and an iron gate standing open, all gradually receding. Between the posts hung a wooden sign, moving gently to and fro in the wind. Looking after them stood a sentry, his hat stuck on the back of his

head, his rifle sprawled across his shoulder like a water-pole.

Then along the roadside appeared a line of puny, sickly saplings with little tufts of leaves at the top. They looked like worn-out feather dusters. The sidewalk glared in the sunlight and they passed a nurse hurrying homeward in her white dress and cap. She looked at them as they passed. And then on the left a long, gray building appeared and around it the dirt lay in yellow heaps and weeds stuck out their heads from the edges of the walk, a ragged fringe. A hush hung over the place. From the west the clouds came pressing. The lightning forked, hung poised an infinitesimal instant, and then was gone. More buildings passed and the soft grinding gave way to smooth, solid going.

The brakes screamed and the car stopped. There was a momentary confusion, a scraping and sound of feet. And then Brawn felt himself gently lifted and carried forward. Suddenly the sunlight fell across his eyes in a blinding glare and he threw up his arms to shut it out. He was carried along with a gentle, swinging motion and then up a flight of steps. The glare faded. He lowered his arms. Some one was holding open a door through which they were carrying him. He caught a glimpse of a red-tiled roof with heavy tile ridge corners. A slender pole rose from the central peak of the roof and from it fluttered a small, white flag with a bright red cross. And then the door closed. There was a hush, the cool touch of a breeze as from a cellar, the faint odour of formalin and the sound of distant shuffling feet. "Room thirty-one," called a voice and he went swinging gently on.



## CHAPTER XXIX

CAPTAIN PARKER paused at the door. "See that he is kept perfectly still, Miss Piper. Not to be allowed to leave his bed under any circumstances." He paused and looked at the door, thoughtfully. "I'll not have time to examine him to-day. Perhaps to-morrow. The usual alcohol rub."

Miss Piper bowed and he departed.

She passed through the room out on to the sleeping porch. In her hand she held a thermometer. Brawn submissively let her put it in his mouth. Then she took his wrist and began to count his pulse. She was a tall, full-blown sort of person with regular features and satiny black hair. There was in her eyes a knowing sort of look. It was as if life held no secrets from her whatever.

She finished the silent toll, looked up at him and smiled with her lips. "Hmm! How do you feel? Want anything?"

"Pretty good," said Brawn. "Any temp?"

"Oh, perhaps," she replied evasively. "Who wants to know?"

Each regarded the other.

"Who brought that stuff?" asked Brawn after a moment, waving his hand toward his army locker in the corner.

"Motor transport, I imagine."

He seemed not to hear her. "Funny. I didn't send for it. But then it's just as well."

Miss Piper turned to go.

"By the way," Brawn detained her. "Find out for me, will you, by what authority I was admitted here."

"Former patient, weren't you?" said the nurse. "And you're a—sick enough."

"Yes, I know. But somebody's got to start things"—he smiled reflectively—"unless—unless, as my old governor used to say, 'The latch string's always on the outside.' Door's always open."

"Oh, not as easy as that," said Miss Piper. She seemed a bit impatient.

"It doesn't matter much. I was just curious." She was leaving. "Get me a book, will you?"

"No reading," she said, over her shoulder.

"What did *he* say?"

"Ask him." She was gone.

It was nearing four o'clock and the sunlight was bright against the opposite wall. There was no one in the adjoining room, so he was the sole occupant of the porch. Raising his head he could see other men in pajamas and bathrobes, some sitting on their beds, others leaning over the balustrade, but they were so far away that apparently no sound came from them.

He was feeling drowsy; there was a faint drumming in the air. He closed his eyes and slept.

When he awoke, the orderly was coming with his supper. He ate perfunctorily, without regard for what he was eating. When he had finished the orderly took away the tray again. There was not a word spoken.

The shadows began to lengthen. Across the field to the south there came a babble of voices. Some one was carrying a mandolin and every now and then he would tinkle it a little. The sound was very gentle—rather sweet in the distance. Over to the southwest, near the horizon, the evening star was winking a pale eye and the sunset tints were fading from the sky, leaving it smooth and gray. Brawn lay watching it for a moment and then turned over and rooted his face into the pillows.

Miss Piper came with a tall, square bottle. "Turn over on your side," she said.

The cool touch of alcohol, that was somewhat oily besides, felt good to him. His back was really quite tired and Miss Piper's hands were soothing. "Been up in the mountains?" she said after a bit.

"Yes," said Brawn.

She rubbed away quietly. "A lot of the men come back after they have been out a few months. What was the matter? Work too hard?"

"No. Don't think I did quite enough."

The soft pressure of her hands ceased. "That's what they all say. You can't get too much rest." The soft, lazy tone in her voice was gone. She rose to her feet, put the stopper in her bottle, and left him.

Night fell. And with it came the coughing—up from Lower West. Faint and indistinct and of no importance it was to Brawn. He no longer seemed to feel. There was no chafing of restraint. It was as if he was no longer called upon. Nothing mattered. His mind was in a curious state of quiet—a sort of satisfaction with himself. Things were out of his hands.

Toward nine o'clock the wind came up. Light, fleecy clouds went drifting across the face of the moon; he could see a shadowy tree top bend over against the sky. . . .

At eleven o'clock the next morning Miss Piper dropped in as she was passing. She looked down at him in her knowing way and then she straightened his bed covers.

"There was a lady came to the office this morning to ask about you," she said. "A young lady. She asked if you were going to stay."

Brawn started. He looked intently into her face and then he looked away. "Was there anybody with her?" he asked at length, casually.

"No. She didn't leave her name. I just happened to be in the office at the time. Get your nourishment this morning?"

Brawn did not answer.

She left him staring at the ceiling.

At a quarter past three Miss Piper returned with her little tray of thermometers. She found Brawn standing before his mirror adjusting his tie.

"Why!" she said, aghast. "What does this mean? Get back into your bed."

Brawn turned around at her and smiled. There was a curious light in his face, she remembered afterward. "I can't," he said. "I'm going out."

She laid her tray down on the table and came and took him by the arm. "Now, Mr. Brawn, let's not be unreasonable." Her tone was soft and cajoling, with as near an entreaty in it as she was able to accomplish. "You know you're not. Now get back into bed."



He pulled away. "Miss Piper," he said, drawing himself up, "when I came in here there was nothing else, I thought, for me to do. But I was wrong." His voice trembled and then his face took on that set expression she had seen men wear on parade when about to receive a medal or some sort of military distinction. She was momentarily fascinated. "You can't just think of yourself, Miss Piper," he went on, "when there's somebody else that needs you." A curious shadow seemed to fall across his eyes. He was, as it were, swept by counter currents of thought—as when a gusty wind meets the incoming tide. "It's more, even, than when they just want you—being needed is. You've got to decide that yourself. The other is out of your hands."

He caught her preoccupied look and he hastened to add: "It's nothing that's happened, I assure you. It's merely that I've been thinking and I've come to certain conclusions. One can't be too dogmatic, you know, Miss Piper. And so I'll have to go in town." He turned from her and proceeded with the tying of his tie.

Miss Piper hurried away.

In a few minutes she returned with Captain Parker. The captain wore a heavy scowl. They found Brawn slipping into his coat.

"What does this mean, Lieutenant?" asked the captain.

Brawn reached up to the shelf and got his hat. "I've got to go out, Captain. In town for a while."

"But I've given orders you were not to leave your bed."

"I know, Captain. I'm sorry. But it's absolutely

necessary." He looked from the doctor to Miss Piper.

The captain was impatient. "You know what will happen to you if you do? You're in a very dangerous condition, Brawn."

"Yes, perhaps. But that can't be considered, Captain. There are some things that rise above a man's consideration for himself. There's his duty."

"A man's got no duty when he's as sick as you are. Why, you'd hardly reach the gate."

Brawn smiled. "Of course you'd look at it from that viewpoint. All doctors want to prolong life. Other people—the laymen—prefer to live it."

"Come, come, Mr. Brawn," interjected the nurse. "Go back to bed, won't you? The captain is telling you straight—for your own good."

Captain Parker brushed her aside impatiently: "That'll be all right. Now listen, Lieutenant. We're not bound to take you in here. And we will not keep you in here if you break the rules. You go out that door and you don't come back. Is that clear to you?"

Brawn stood with his hand on the knob. "So, if I go now, I can't come back?" He paused and considered. "Well, I don't suppose you can help it. You only do as you're told. And it wouldn't do any good to explain things to you. Don't know as I'd care to. You'd tell me to write a note or something. But I can't do that. It wouldn't be the right way. It wouldn't be enough." He seemed to be talking to some protagonist of his own mind. Suddenly he turned to Miss Piper and laughed. "If I'm not careful you'll get me to worrying about myself again. Who wants to live forever, anyway?"

"Take your time. It won't look so important tomorrow," said she.

Captain Parker started to speak but controlled himself and was silent.

"That stuff," said Brawn, "over in the corner—I'll send for it in a day or two maybe. Well! I didn't stay long, did I." He laughed. "So long, everybody."

To his mocking bravado there was no answer.

They watched him go down the corridor, walking slowly and a bit unsteadily.

"Wonder what's eatin' on him?" said Miss Piper. "Talks like he's rehearsing for some play or something."

"Damn fool!" exploded Parker. "What is one going to do when they get like that?" He threw out his hands in a gesture of resignation.

Brawn approached the end of the hall. They watched him near the stairway, saw him reel slightly and then reach out his hand and take hold of the banister—saw him steady himself. He paused there for a moment, looking down. And then he passed round the partition corner, out of sight.

THE END







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